

# DE VALCOURT;

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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But ah! the Historic Muse has never dar'd  
To pierce those hallow'd bowers: 'tis fancy's beam  
Pour'd on the vision of the enraptur'd bard,  
That paints the charms of that delicious theme:  
Then hail sweet fancy's ray; and hail the dream  
That weans the weary soul from guilt and woe:  
Careless what others of my choice may deem,  
I long, where love and fancy lead, to go.  
And meditate on heav'n—enough of earth I know.

BRATTY.

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# DE VALCOURT.

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## CHAP. I.

But ah ! the crowd of wretched souls,  
Fetter'd to minds of different moulds,  
And chain'd to eternal strife.

WATTS.

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IN the dissipated court of Charles the second, in the sunshine of royal favour, flourished the Earl of Mountshannon ; a man of weak intellect, turbulent and ambitious, yet possessing a graceful exterior, elegant address, and polished manners ; while, on the borders of Scotland, in an old gothic mansion that was once a castle, and to which some fortifications, some mouldering turrets, and de-

cayed ramparts still belonged, resided, unknowing and unknown, his deserted family.

The castle, which bore the name of Mountford, was situated on an eminence. The western front commanded a view of the ocean, and the rocky cliffs that overhung the beach; the eastern apartments, the only habitable part of this vast building, looked to the valley below, where a few neat cottages and some small farms, formed the hamlet.

The Earl, though bred a Catholic, and attached by early prejudice to the royal party, was too much a man of the world to maintain his principles at the risk of his fortune; always the ready tool of power, he was eager to aid the ambitious projects of Cromwell, soon as the interest of his unfortunate sovereign began to decline.

While acting in concert with the usurper, who to gratify his own selfish views over-  
turned

turned all the efforts of patriot virtue for the liberty and happiness of his country, he became acquainted with the only daughter and heiress of Sir Thomas Mountford. Her immense wealth induced him to offer his hand; nor did the sacrifice of his religion to the opinion of Sir Thomas, a zealous presbyterian, appear of sufficient consequence to balance the great advantages that might arise from such a union. Matilda Mountford was a woman of sound and highly cultivated understanding; benevolent, artless, and sincere; educated near one of the provincial towns of France by a maternal aunt, her early days had passed in retirement; the little society she had mixed with was such as to rouse the latent sparks of genius, and call forth intellectual exertions, while it fostered romantic feelings, which a more general knowledge of the world might have suppressed. On the death of her aunt she returned to her father's house, who, gloomy and severe, checked all her lively sallies, and damped that innocent cheerfulness and

sportive gaiety with which she had been wont to charm: she felt the change; her spirits sank, and the paternal roof seemed the tomb of all her hopes.

Matilda, under the influence of these feelings, was introduced to Lord Mountshannon; the ease and vivacity of his manners formed a pleasing contrast with the cold reserve of those persons with whom she was now compelled to pass her time; nor were his personal attractions wholly lost on a girl of eighteen, and after a very short acquaintance, she yielded, with little reluctance, to her father's commands, and became a wife, without knowing the temper, pursuits, or inclinations of the man who was to be the guide of her future life, and to whom she had solemnly vowed obedience. 'Tis true she married without that glow of affection that binds mutual souls, where mind forms the basis of union, and on which her imagination had often dwelt with fond and romantic delight; yet, listening to the dictates of hope, she



she expected to find her husband an affectionate friend ; a rational companion, in whose bosom she could pour forth all her joys and sorrows ; whose heart would beat in unison with her own ; whose virtues would insure her esteem. A very few months however, convinced her she was mistaken ; in the mind of his lordship she could find no associate ; it would not assimilate with her's ; he could listen to the emanations of genius unmoved ; nor had the tender caresses of affection power to soften his heart : the joys of the sensualist were the only ones of which his vitiated faculties were susceptible : she sighed with regret at the painful disappointment ; and her soul sickened at the recollection, that only death could break the fetters voluntarily put on, or dissolve the mental slavery in which she was bound.

During the life of her father, Lord Mountshannon continued to treat his wife with cold esteem ; but that was ill calculated to answer her ardent feelings, to fill the aching void in

her bosom, and render existence valuable : in the prospect too of becoming a mother, she could not look on the father of her child with indifference, and exerted all her powers to awaken affection in his heart, but in vain. The hour at length arrived that made Lady Mountshannon a mother, who, as she pressed her infant daughter to her bosom, felt a new and delightful sensation ; she had in her an object on whom to lavish her affection without fearing those chilling blasts which had hitherto repressed her feelings, and damped every rising hope : the sentiment sunk deep in her mind, whilst more than maternal fondness warmed her heart. Lord Mountshannon too experienced a father's feelings, and, though the glow was transient, it excited in him a tenderness towards his wife unfelt before, who, deceived by appearances, fancying she beheld a gleam of returning happiness, entered with rapture into the public rejoicings — his lordship made on the occasion. This scene of delight was, however, of short duration : Sir Thomas Mountford died before

fore the infant Matilda was six months old, and having, on a closer investigation of the character of Lord Mountshannon, discovered his hypocrisy, and dreading more than any thing that his grand children should be educated in a religion so pregnant with error, as in his opinion was the Roman Catholic, bequeathed the whole of his property to the heir or heirs of his daughter, under her immediate direction, intirely independent of the controul or interference of her husband. Thus disappointed in all his expectations, his temper, naturally selfish, became harsh and sullen; no longer under any restraint in his behaviour, and regarding his wife with suspicion as the cause of the old baronet's whim, his former respectful conduct changed into brutal ill-humour. She was condemned to listen to vain regrets or harsh reproaches whenever he passed an hour in her society. Depressed by langour of body, for she was again in a state of pregnancy, her spirits sunk under his tyranny, and the sigh of despair

burst from her heart at this proof of his want of humanity.

“Is it not enough,” said she, “to be united to a man I can neither love nor esteem, (for spite of all her casuistry, of every effort to hide from herself the dislike she felt for an unworthy husband, her mind was alive to the truth in all its force) but must I endure his coarse usage, and meanly submit to his authority?—No! every principle of virtue indignantly revolts at the idea: yet, alas! to whom can I apply for redress? the laws of society admit of no remedy.”

Her only resources from inquietude were in the infantine endearments of her little charge; in providing for its present wants, and planning schemes for its future happiness. Her temper, naturally warm and romantic, was corrected by the coolness of her judgment, which was strengthened by disappointment, and the necessity she was now under of acting for herself. Influenced by her observations



servations on the healthy looks of the hardy peasants, and regardless of the vulgar censures that might assail her, she resolved that enervating indulgence should not blast the infant years of her child, who, lightly clad, lived almost in the open air. The birth of a son made no change in Lord Mountshannon; he never visited home but to complain or chide; and the death of the protector, together with the restoration of monarchy, which happened soon after, giving a new turn to his fortunes, he became wholly neglectful of the tender ties he had formed.

From his activity in the monarch's affairs, he found no difficulty in obtaining from the easy indolent Charles a pardon of his past conduct, which, glossed by his art, appeared rather the result of necessity than of choice; immersed in pleasures, unwilling to bear the fatigue of searching for truth, the king believed his assurances, admitted him to his confidence, and raised him to posts of dignity

and trust. Young, handsome, and deserted, Lady Mountshannon was an object of attention to all the dissipated rakes of the court ; but though the tie of affection which bound her to her husband was broken ; though he had formed a sensual connection with another, and the prevalence of example seemed to countenance vice ; so ardent were her maternal feelings, so solicitous was she for the happiness of her children, that, shuddering at her situation, she resolved to retire from the metropolis.

The castle of Mountford, with great part of the estate belonging to it, had been settled on her at her marriage ; in this castle Lord Mountshannon heard, with astonishment and pleasure, it was her wish to reside : he had always dreaded her as a monitress, and been awed by the superior powers of her mind : as her presence was a restraint on his pleasures, and a reproach to his conduct, he joyfully prepared it for her reception.

Lady

Lady Mountshannon quitted London with little regret; she had formed no friendship there to interest her heart, or excite one sorrowful sensation, one parting sigh: she had been insulted by the gallantry of her male acquaintance, and the pity of her female. The beautiful scenery that surrounded the castle, the honest expressions of heart-felt joy with which the tenants welcomed her arrival, soothed her; and the artless prattle of infant reason, already opening in the minds of her children, soon restored her native cheerfulness. The castle had once been the seat of hospitality; revelry and mirth had once echoed through its now desolated apartments; plenty had then enlivened the village, and the cottagers, soon as they knew Lady Mountshannon was come to reside amongst them, expected the return of those days they had so often heard their fathers talk of with delight.

Determined to live in the simplest stile, and confine her wants within the limits of

her own fortune, as she could not endure to owe pecuniary obligations to a husband who no longer engaged her affections, or break into the sacred deposit committed to her care for the future comfort of her children, she endeavoured to form a plan of conduct that might, while it secured her own independence, enable her to render them happy.

A table was weekly kept in the great saloon, to which all the villagers were invited, and where she constantly resided, enquiring herself into their wants, redressing the little grievances of which they complained, softening the severity of poverty by kind attentions; while her instructions induced the ignorant to reflect, the selfish heart to expand, and find new sources of happiness in the communication of benefits. Thus at a small expence she not only secured the love of her tenantry, but by active benevolence banished *ennui* from her own mind, and though a sigh would sometimes escape when reflecting on her forlorn state, yet with such  
ample



ample means of bestowing happiness on others, and a heart glowing with maternal feelings, filled with interesting solicitude for her children, her's was more than negative enjoyment. It was the the first wish of Lady Mountshannon to inculcate moral virtue in the hearts of her offspring, to form their minds on principles of rectitude: conscious too with what force first impressions fasten on the mind, and anxious early to form some system for their education, she thought deeply on the subject; ignorant of the world's opinion, her plans were the result of her own reflection, aided by minute observations.

## CHAP. II.

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By degrees

The human blossom blows, and every day,  
Soft as it rolls along, shews some new charm :  
Then infant reason grows apace, and calls  
For the kind hand of an assiduous care.  
Delightful task ! to rear the tender thought,  
To pour the fresh instruction o'er the mind,  
To breath the enlivening spirit, and to fix  
The generous purpose in the glowing breast.

THOMSON.

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ACCUSTOMED to rise early, Lady Mountshannon accompanied her children in their morning walks, whilst her love of nature became a higher sentiment, and gratitude to its author glowed with increased fervor, as she beheld them gamboling on the verdant meads, marked their ruddy countenances beaming health, saw their eyes sparkling with intelligence and joy, or traced the progress of reason in their awakened curiosity when new or striking objects attracted their attention,

attention, and exercised their imagination. Delightful indeed were the emotions as they clung on her garments, and with eagerness caught the information their mother, in language suited to their infantine capacities, conveyed.

No mercenary or ignorant attendant, with harsh and obscure answers, repelled the love of knowledge nature implants in the mind, but which repressed, it loses by imperceptible degrees; while by rudely checking the powers of fancy, those lively emotions, which might be fostered into that elevated and ennobling sensibility which constitutes so much of virtuous enjoyment are destroyed, and instead of deriving soft complacency, or lofty admiration from beholding the beauty and magnificence of creation, they sink into tasteless indifference, which confirmed by consequent habits of indolence, the sweetest feelings of the heart, and most exalted faculties of the mind, are palsied for ever. Without following any regular

gular plan, or imposing on the volatility of youth the task of study, her conversation conveyed instruction; and in the little tales purposely written for them by their mother, her young pupils found constant amusement, scarcely conscious of the gradual improvement their minds thus pleasantly imbibed. Habituated to reflect, accustomed early to provide for their own wants, they acquired habits of independence, and the love of knowledge became their ruling passion.

As their understandings ripened they were, under the eye of their mother, instructed in the various branches of science. Matilda pursued the same studies as her brother Mountford, whilst the same sports were allowed to invigorate her constitution: she could bound over the meadows, climb the trees, skip through the rope, or beat the ball with equal agility. Between them there was no jealous emulation; their hearts beat with affection; improvement gained by the one gave pleasure to the other; for they were  
never



never chidden for dullness of perception, or taught to exult in superior faculties. Strangers to fear they would wander through the antique apartments of the castle, explore the secret passages, listen to the wind as it whistled through the long galleries, undismayed; of supernatural appearances they never heard, and of human beings they had no dread.

The religion they were taught left the mind unchained: they saw God through the medium of his works as a god of justice and benevolence: they were led to observe every object in creation formed to enjoy a portion of happiness, from rational man to the meanest insect; and their own feelings taught them to believe, that kindness to those objects must be the most acceptable service to the creator. In every pursuit of active benevolence they were encouraged by their mother; and though, through the wise regulations of Lady Mountshannon, scenes of distress seldom occurred to exercise their feelings,

feelings, yet Mountford would often, as they walked through the village, rescue some hucklebs animal from the torture inflicted in thoughtless sport by a ruthless clown, and while Matilda eagerly ran with the prize to the castle, would either pay the unfeeling boy the price he sat on his victim, or by an effort of his prowess compel him to relinquish his cruelty. But their mother, careful rather to repress than excite sensibility, would never appeal to their feelings for the performance of any duty: as they grew up she endeavoured to make them comprehend the difference between sensibility and benevolence.

“ Sensibility,” she would often say, “ shrinks from pain, and avoids every appearance of distress: benevolence, though it bleeds at every pore when contemplating general or individual woe, active to ameliorate the condition of man, flies not scenes of misery, but revolves and re-revolves every possible alleviation, and though frequently obliged to witness wretchedness it cannot relieve

lieve, will seek sorrow in its most solitary abode, amply repaid when it can chase care from the afflicted bosom: while feeling is without distinction in its benefits; and though it may sometimes answer the purposes of benevolence to mankind, yet as its actions arise rather from a wish to avoid pain than communicate happiness, it is unstable, indiscriminate, and frequently lavishes favours on the undeserving.

Every branch of literature was cultivated by their mother with anxious solicitude, and their growing improvement more than repaid her care; yet as all knowledge was in her opinion subservient to the grand science of morality, she was careful to exemplify the precepts she taught: youth she knew was observant, and had witnessed the dangerous relaxation, when looking to its teachers with reverence, it had seen them fall short of their wisest maxims. As their minds expanded, Matilda discovered a quickness of perception which was not found with Mountford: he  
was

was good tempered, docile, and affectionate; she high spirited, irritable, quickly susceptible of right and wrong; a stranger to disguise, her passions kindled at sight of oppression, and fearless of every personal danger, she expressed her glowing indignation against the oppressor, though sheltered by titled grandeur or the hoary appearance of wisdom: her heart was benevolent, her affections ardent, and her bosom beat with those fine sensations which mark the child of genius, and give to joy and sorrow those exquisite powers to charm or wound.

Lady Mountshannon saw with pain the warm feelings of Matilda; conscious of the ills she might have to encounter, of the power a father's command had over a daughter, however unworthy his own conduct, she endeavoured to inspire her mind with fortitude, that under every oppressive circumstance, she might find support in the firmness of her principles.

Time



Time glided on in a course of improvement, and Matilda attained her eighteenth year without seeing the being to whom she owed her existence ; for his lordship was too much engrossed by dissipation, and too much the slave of an artful woman (who, by accommodating herself to his passions, watching every weakness, ruled him with despotic sway) to allow him leisure to visit his family. Indeed he seldom made enquiries concerning them : when he wrote it was merely letters of business, as he left it to her ladyship to collect and remit to him the rents which belonged to his part of the estate. Matilda often thought of her father : curiosity awakened a strong desire to know something of his character ; but observing the tear start in her mother's eye whenever she led to the subject, she forbore to speak of him, though her imagination dwelt incessantly on the subject, while fancy painted his image under every distorted appearance of nature : he haunted her dreams in frightful shapes, and she often awoke in terror escaping from his grasp. In proportion

proportion as the disgust she thus unconsciously fostered against her father strengthened, affection and reverence for her mother encreased: from the villagers she had heard some unconnected tales to which fancy gave colouring; she viewed her mother with pity; the tear would sometimes roll down her cheek as she sat listening to her conversation: this threw a pensive sadness over her manners, and gave an interesting melancholy to her appearance.

With a vivid imagination, and enthusiastic feelings, which every circumstance conspired to heighten, it was one of Matilda's chief pleasures, in her melancholy moments, to wander through the fields, view the mouldering turrets of the castle, walk round its ramparts, and listen to the dashing of the waves on the shore, or mark the sun sinking beneath the ocean, while the feathered choristers sang their evening hymn. Filled with the sublime images her fancy created, and revelling in a world of imaginary delights, she

she would stray beyond the limits of the castle ; and night has often spread its curtain over the landscape before her reveries were broken. In her gayer hours she would seek the houses of the cottagers, play with the children, teach them to read, and, by communicating knowledge to them, increase her own. Among her favourites were the children of Mary, her nurse, who being now a widow, the orphan babes interested her pity, and seemed to have a claim to her protection : they improved under her instruction, and she felt something like maternal concern for her young pupils.

Lord Mountshannon, though possessed of a large estate, together with high offices at court, still found his income inadequate to his expences, and had lately written to demand of his wife a loan from the interest of their children's fortune, which loan she positively refused to grant : he had then ordered her to raise the tenantry, as he would have supplies ; but well knowing the poor could  
bear

bear no additional burdens, without losing all the comforts of life, she refused to be the instrument of oppression ; and though firm in her opposition, she dreaded her husband's violence, and her spirits sunk : this was a new cause of sorrow to Matilda, a new motive for dislike to her father.

Mountford and Matilda were now employed in a series of historic reading ; Lady Mountshannon made observations as they read, and by mingling her reflections with their studies, taught them to develope the human character ; not merely to trace the rise and fall of empires, but to discover the causes from which that decay proceeded. Matilda observed with pain, that all political systems were systems of destruction ; that one nation after another had risen to eminence, and again been driven from observation by its more powerful neighbour : she shrunk from the cruelties and vices presented to her view ; and sighed to think, though civilization had a little changed the form of war,  
it



it had not repressed it ; that communities were more virtuous whilst following the dictates of nature, than when polished by science. Oppressed by her own reflections, she retired from study to her favourite walk, but the beauties of nature had no power over her mind ; she dwelt on the miseries of life, on the numberless victims to ambition, on her species annihilated by thousands, with horror : her thoughts rose to her creator, but a mist spread before her eyes.

“ Great God,” cried she, “ why dost thou suffer man to trample on his fellow man !—Does his wrath indeed praise thee !—Canst thou delight in the misery of thy creatures ?” But checking the thoughts which tumultuously arose : “ Teach me,” said she, “ to know myself and thee, or bow to thy inscrutable decrees.”

The dinner bell now rang, when hastening to the parlour, a new object agitated her spirits ; her mother had been in tears, and

her heart was still evidently oppressed, though she endeavoured to be calm; Matilda could not eat; the meal was silent and sad; but when the door closed on the servant who had attended, she threw herself on her mother's neck, entreating to know the cause of her present sorrow.

Lady Mountshannon folding her to her bosom, and presenting a letter, "This, my child," she cried, "is the source of my inquietude:" it was her father's superscription; she held it some moments in her trembling hand, then opening, read as follows:

"I have too long been the dupe of your hypocrisy or weakness; it is time to rouse; my estate is not let for half its value; the small farms may be incorporated, and their produce will then greatly increase. I shall send Mr. Thrifty to regulate my affairs; he is well acquainted with the country, and will not be unjust. But if the present occupiers, rendered indolent by your indulgence, cannot

not pay the advance, they must make room for more active persons. My children, too, I have weakly resigned to your care, and have too long yielded obedience to the dying command of a bigot. If you are determined to resist the wishes, you may in future, dread the power, of your injured husband,

“ MOUNTSHANNON.”

Indignation now took place of every other feeling: Disdain sparkled in her eye, while she endeavoured to animate her mother with contempt for conduct so unworthy her virtues. But this was of short duration; left to herself, sorrow again filled her heart; she sat some time absorbed in gloomy reflections: a volume of Shakespere lay on the table, she opened the page, but it had lost the power to charm; her eye fixed on the leaf, though it could not rouse her attention, or sooth the painful feelings that corroded her mind. She walked to the window; the sun, though declining, still shed a glow over creation. Animated by the scene, she took

up her pencil, when the image of the new steward intruded on her, and ideas of her father combining, her sketches were gloomy as her fancy, and she threw them by in disgust.

Mary now occurred to her mind. Perhaps in a few weeks she will be torn from her cot, exposed to want and misery, and I shall never see her little prattlers more. Ah, no! it cannot be, again thought she; man is not so lost to feeling; and black as her imagination had painted this steward, yet, even he, could not but respect and pity a forlorn and amiable woman. With pensive steps Matilda strolled towards the cottage, while the children, who beheld her at a distance, ran over the meadows to meet her, with pleasure beaming on their faces. Their playfulness soon tranquilised her mind. They repeated her lessons. She made them little presents: partook of their evening repast, new milk and fruits, and departed with renovated spirits.

It



It was a fine evening, about the middle of August; the sun was gradually sinking beneath the ocean, while his last rays still lingered on the hills. The moon, nearly at the full, had risen, and mingling her soft beams with the sun's more resplendant rays, shed a pleasing melancholy over departing day. The gentle breeze scarce moved the ripened foliage; creation seemed hushed in silence, no sound was heard, save the plaintive voice of the nightingale, soothing the soul to pensive thoughtfulness. The scene harmonized her feelings, it formed a pleasing contrast with the restless turbulence of thought, the events of the day had given rise to, and Matilda endeavoured, as she walked silently on, to express in some poetic effusion, all the lively emotions she felt.

Absorbed in the pleasing delusions of fancy, she had proceeded a considerable distance in a wrong path, before she perceived her error. The day having closed, and the

moon more faintly glimmering through the trees, at length recalled her recollection.

Seriously alarmed for the pain her absence would occasion, she would instantly have gone back, but that would prolong her walk, and retard her return. A break in the path she was now in, led directly to the castle, and this she determined to observe with all possible care. With quickened steps she pursued her way, anxiously looking for the path, but in vain.

A sudden cloud now obscured the moon, and spreading gloom darkened the atmosphere; a sultry heat filled the air, while the rising breeze over the distant ocean foretold the coming storm. Without any fixed plan, Matilda ran forward, fearing she had missed the road; yet, as she had never before explored her present path, not wholly without hope it would lead towards her home,—when almost breathless with haste and terror, she arrived on a wide extended heath;  
in

in vain did she look round for the turrets of the castle, or some familiar object to direct her wandering steps; her eye could not penetrate through the increasing darkness of the night.

Slowly and fearfully she now moved on; the wind encreased, and the waves dashed impetuously on the beach. She listened for the sound of some human voice, and again looked wistfully round, when a furze-bush caught her dress, and stooping to disengage herself, her foot slipped, and she was instantly precipitated down a steep descent; but gliding gently from one break in the rock to another, she reached the bottom without receiving any material injury.

The thunder now rolled, the rain poured in torrents, while the lightening flashing along the horizon, discovered a huge rock, whose hoary top overhung, with terrific grandeur, the beach where she stood; it likewise discovered a small cavity, into which she crept;

where wet, bruised, and exhausted, she sunk on the cold earth.

The rattling of the thunder was soon hushed, the rain soon ceased to pour; but the darkness which still covered the sky, rendering it dangerous to return, Matilda sat impatiently watching the dawn of day, as she knew it must be some hours after sun-rise before the tide could prevent her return, when her attention was roused by the sound of a human voice! it seemed to speak the language of complaint, in low dying murmurs; she listened with breathless terror, till the sounds were lost in still more awful silence. The voice was distant, for no distinct sounds had reached her ear—but the time and place contributing to encrease her fears, she yielded for some moments to the terrors imagination created—when again, a deep and lengthened groan echoed through the hollow cavern!—Though palsied for a time by the dread of fancied ills, Matilda had too much real courage, and too strong a mind  
to



to yield to those vain fears, and rightly judging the sounds to proceed from some person in distress, with a tremulous voice she called, and in the softest language of pity, proffered assistance. The sound filled the hollow rock, till it slowly melted in air, when a groan, weaker than the former, seemed to implore the assistance she had offered.

Impelled now by the strong feelings of humanity, she endeavoured to grope her way through some cavity, whence the sounds had issued, but profound darkness rendered every effort ineffectual.

Again reduced to inactive expectation, fancy presented a thousand dreadful visions, whilst every breeze that whistled through the long cavities, increased her terrors. The groans, though continued at intervals, became fainter and fainter, as the night wore away.

Matilda would have quitted this dreadful place, had not humanity fixed her to the spot; yet she feared, lest the dawn might come too late to relieve the object of her solicitude; lest death, ere then, should have rendered all assistance vain. To her the warring elements had been less terrific than the present shelter, and any danger would have been preferable to the dreadful suspense in which she must pass the night.

The dawn at last illumined her solitary abode, and fear subsiding, as every object appeared in its real form, disrobed of the gloom in which fear had dressed it, with renovated courage she sought the inmost recesses of the cave, and entering a narrow passage to the right, from which she had judged the noise to proceed, carefully advanced. It was lighted only by a small and distant opening, which shed a faint and glimmering ray, and was in many parts so low and narrow as to render it extremely difficult to pass. At length, after much exertion, she reached a wide-vaulted cavern, that led again to the beach,

beach, so curiously formed it might have been taken for the exquisite workmanship of the artist, rather than the rude formation of nature.

Looking wistfully round, she beheld a youth stretched on the moss and interwoven sea-weed, which plentifully covered the ground; his long hair matted with the blood which still flowed from a wound in the forehead, hung dishevelled over his face; the murmur of complaint ceased to issue from his lips, and life seemed fast ebbing away. With anxious tenderness she approached; the hand was still warm, and the pulse, though faint, continued to beat. A transient gleam of joy animated her spirits! A clear spring, filtering through the small cavities, afforded her the means of immediate relief—taking some of the precious drops in the broken hollow of a dis-jointed stone, and gently raising his head, she washed the blood from his pallid face, and binding her hand-

kerchief round the wound, he began to revive.

Matilda knelt by his side, his head rested on her bosom, while her arm supported him. Gazing wildly round, his eye met her's, as returning life for a moment animated his features; it was a look of supplicating tenderness that spoke to her heart. Bending over him with affectionate concern, she took his hand—but exhausted nature was unable to bear the varied sensations that rushed at once on his heart; his eyes were immediately closed; the cold hand dropped listless from her grasp, and again he sunk on the earth, but the warm breath convincing her life still remained, she flew to seek assistance.

It was not difficult to discover the chasm down which she had been precipitated the preceding night; but she was surprised to find it so easy of ascent; as her fears, when falling, had represented it a vast abyss. On  
gaining



gaining the summit, she beheld the castle in the distant prospect ; yet that afforded very little comfort at the present moment, and she sought in vain for some nearer habitation—it was at least two miles from the spot where she now stood, and all between was rocky cliff, covered with barren heath ; not even a clay-built hut was to be seen. Her blood chilled with horror ! Perhaps, ere she could reach the castle, the stranger might expire ; perhaps, too, the waters might have gained so on the beach, that to rescue him would be impossible.

While thus she stood motionless with despair, unable to decide what course to pursue, she saw some men ascend a distant hill. Hope gave her strength ; she ran towards the spot, screaming for help. Her voice, borne on the wind, soon reached their ears ; and Matilda beheld with surprise and rapture, the faces of some village swains, who grieved at her sudden absence, were already risen to aid the domestics in their search.

Delighted

Delighted with their success in thus discovering her, and happy in every opportunity of obliging her, she led them to the place whence she had left the stranger, and they bore him insensible along, while she hastened forward to relieve her mother's fears.

Lady Mountshannon, while writing to her husband the preceeding evening, had seen from her window, Matilda take the road to the village; and knowing her enthusiastic love of nature, had waited a full hour after the day had closed, unapprehensive of danger, though she dispatched the servants to her favourite walks. But when they returned without tidings, her heart sunk. The violent storm, and, the clashing elements increased her terror; and every effort to find her proving ineffectual, she passed the night in a state of anxiety hardly supportable. Mountford exerted all his talents to cheer and soothe her, losing his own fears in the wish to calm the troubled spirits of his mother.

Matilda

Matilda, who eagerly bounded over the hills, was just folded in her mother's arms, when the servants brought the stranger through the court, and had then only time to express her hopes that they might be able to save a young man from death, before he was in the house.

Lady Mountshannon waiting not for more information, hastened to administer some restorative cordial, while Matilda gazed on his inanimate form with tender solicitude.

Mountford, who had just returned from seeking his sister in another road, stood in mute wonder, contemplating the scene ; but his feeling heart not suffering him to remain an indolent spectator, he went for medical assistance. A warm bed was immediately prepared, to which the stranger had been carried before he arrived with the surgeon.

The

The wound was then examined, and though not found dangerous, yet, loss of blood had so extremely weakened the patient, as to give cause for fear. The body and limbs, too, being violently bruised, and alarming symptoms of fever continuing to increase, rendered his life, for some days, doubtful.

Matilda would have watched the bedside, had not her own health been almost as precarious as his. Agitation of mind, for some hours, prevented her feeling the effects of passing the night in a damp cave, with clothes drenched in rain: that subsiding, she felt a cold shivering through her frame; her head throbbed with pain, and unable longer to support exertion, she retired to her chamber.

The surgeon, whose humanity did honour to his profession, remained at the castle, carefully attending to every change in his patients; and Matilda, with a constitution naturally strong and healthy, soon recovered. The stranger, who had received a more violent



violent shock, remained in a state of insensibility, even after the fever was abated.

Strongly interested in the fate of one, whose life she had preserved, Matilda felt a degree of fretful impatience, when forbade to see him, to which, till that moment, she had been a stranger; and nothing but the fear lest the sight of new objects might retard his recovery, could have restrained her.

Every acquisition to their society, in so retired a situation, seemed desirable; nor could she help adorning, with all the graces of mental excellence, the man whose introduction had been so very romantic, while her imagination fondly traced the new source of intellectual delights which would open to her in his conversation, as it must be some time after his recovery before he could quit the castle.

Mountford, too, almost envied her the pleasure of saving life. He wished to explore

plore the walk, which, by deceiving his sister, had led to such a singular event, and was already prepared to love their new acquaintance. Lady Mountshannon, though she trembled at her daughter's danger, while Matilda recited her little narrative, rejoiced in the opportunity of conferring a benefit.

As the stranger recovered his sanity of mind, some faint recollection of the past returned. He remembered, when first recovering in the cave, he had seen Matilda, and almost fancied himself in another world, attended by some ministering spirit: yet, so bewildered were his thinking powers, so visionary seemed every event, he found it impossible to realize the circumstances.

Of the surgeon he made many enquiries, who at length, thought it best to give him a particular account of his escape, and the family to whom his accident had introduced him; and then, at his request, the impatient Matilda was introduced.

He

He was seated in an elbow chair, from which he made an effort to rise, as she entered, but his limbs refusing their office, he again sunk down, while a faint glow overspread his pallid face, and his dark eyes beamed gratitude and love. She held out her hand, which he respectfully pressed to his lips, and then, in faltering accents, attempted to express his thanks for her past kindness, when Matilda silenced him by saying, she had only followed the dictates of nature, which it would have been criminal to resist, and leading immediately to indifferent subjects, he became calm.

Lady Mountshannon was at length introduced: they chatted away an hour, and discovering a congeniality of mind and sentiment, they parted mutually pleased and interested with each other.

From this time, Lady Mountshannon, with Matilda and Mountford, spent the afternoons in his apartment. He appeared  
about

about eight and twenty; his figure tall and commanding; his air dignified, yet easy; a soft melancholy, which demanded your sympathy, and spoke a heart acquainted with woe, overspread his countenance; while his fine eyes varying their expression with every emotion of the soul, now darting passion—now beaming softness, rendered him an interesting object to a heart of sensibility. His conversation was bold and energetic; his sentiments generous, and his heart enlarged. He had seen the world, and knew mankind, but had not yet learned to be suspicious, or lost the relish for simple nature's charms, and his literary attainments seemed of a very superior kind.

Lady Mountshannon was charmed with his company; she loved the society of hearts in unison with her own; and his was a pleasing relief to her present solitude.

Mountford was delighted with his account of a world he longed to enter; but Matilda's sensations



sensations were too poignant for expression. She saw pleasure illumine the stranger's face at her approach, and sorrow cloud it when she departed: her heart glowed with delight at the thought of adding to the happiness of a being she had preserved. New wishes were awakened in her bosom, yet she could not analyze her feelings; but hope painted the future in vivid colours; sorrow had never yet embittered her hours, or disappointment repressed the energy of her mind, and she willingly listened to its delusive flatteries.

Musical one day forming the subject of discourse, and the stranger displaying much taste and judgment in the art, Matilda, at the request of her mother, took her harp; his expressions had been ardent; he loved the science, and she felt a kind of tumultuous joy thrill her nerves. She ran over a few bars of bold symphony, then gradually melting into softer sounds, she sang a little sonnet, addressed to melancholy, in the simple

simple stile of the Scotch ballad. The words were poetic ; a tear started to the stranger's eye as he gazed on her with rapture, and her voice becoming tremulous, added to the pathos of her strains. He felt its influence, and he felt, too, what he had long endeavoured to conceal from himself—the struggles of an infant passion.

Displeased with himself for having so long delayed to inform Lady Mountshannon who she thus sheltered, he entreated she would indulge him, the following day, with her attention, while he related his history, the events of which were so interwoven, he could scarce account for his present situation, without going back to an early period ; and as he wished to interest her friendship, he thought it right to give her every opportunity of judging his character : and though he knew his narrative would lead her to condemn some parts of his conduct, yet she should know him as he was ; he would not extenuate one error.

Lady

Lady Mountshannon accepted the proposal with pleasure ; she had for some time wished to know more of her guest, though too delicate to lead to the subject ; yet, in his virtues, his integrity, she felt the firmest confidence.

Matilda retired to bed ; but, filled with lively expectations of the morrow, found it impossible to sleep. She had already decked her hero with every virtue, and fancy was now culling from the gifts of fortune, all that could adorn the picture. Thus happy in the dreams of imagination, the dawn arose on her unclosed eye-lids.

Far different were the stranger's sensations ; he felt a lively passion for Matilda, which he had not resolution to oppose : he had never seen an object so entirely worthy esteem ; so calculated to inspire him with affection ; yet, his situation almost precluded hope. He paced the room with disordered steps ; he endeavoured to trace the

the past incidents of his life, but when he recollected the rank he was going to claim rested solely on his own assertions, and remembered how inadequate even the energies of truth often are to conviction, he shrunk from the task he had undertaken.

There were moments in his life degraded with vice, which it pained him to think of; yet, he could not bear, under the appearance of openness and candour, to conceal the evil part of his character, and cheat the unsuspecting of praise. Another circumstance affected him still more; if Lady Mountshannon had seen his affection for Matilda, prudence might oblige her to banish him from the castle, when his present forlorn state was known, and how could he endure to part with society so interesting to him! In vain did he endeavour to compose his spirits.

When the party met next day, unusual thoughtfulness saddened his features; his  
manners



manners were embarrassed, and his mind agitated, though he had been at evident pains to compose its restless feelings. After a short pause he began his narration, nearly in the following terms :

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## CHAP. III.

Of chance or change, oh, let not man complain

Else will he never, never cease to wail ;

For from the imperial dome, to where the swain

Rears the lone cottage in the silent dale ;

All feel the assault of fortune's fickle gale.

Art, empire, earth itself, to change are doom'd ;

Earthquakes have raised to heaven the humble vale,

And gulphs the mountain's mighty mass entomb'd ;

And where the Atlantic rolls, wide continents have  
bloom'd.

BEATTY.

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“MY grandfather, the Marquis de Valcourt, a native of France, was educated at that court, during the time Mary of Scotland resided there ; and becoming a personal favorite of that unfortunate and misguided princess, he was one of those who left their country and friends to follow her fortunes, when she, reluctantly, returned to take on herself the government of her kingdom.

“ Firm in his attachments, his life was spent in efforts to shield her from the distress

tress in which her weak conduct continually involved her. Blinded by her insinuating address, he could not believe her capable of flagrant ill, but warmly opposed the censures raised against her after the violent death of Lord Darnly; and during her long confinement in England, exerted all his power and influence to oppose the cruel tyranny of Elizabeth.

“After the death of his royal mistress he quitted public affairs, and finding his circumstances embarrassed, endeavoured by economy to retrieve his finances; but wholly ignorant of business, and averse to the drudgery of arithmetical calculations, he made no progress in relieving his pecuniary difficulties; and at his death had nothing to leave my father, his only surviving son, but an ill-cultivated estate in the highlands of Scotland, together with a small sum of ready cash, the wreck of his large property, and an enthusiastic attachment to royalty, and the Stuart family.

“ My father, who had been some time secretly married to a beautiful woman without fortune, soon felt the pressure of embarrassed circumstances; but Charles the First ascending the throne, with whom he had formed an early friendship, he was promoted to posts of honor, and enabled to indulge the natural bent of his temper, and figure in the higher circles of life. He had early imbibed high notions of prerogative, and was one of those who flattered the King in all his encroachments on the liberty of his subjects.

“ Prosperous in his fortunes, his domestic happiness continued uninterrupted: A son and daughter were the pledges and cement of his union; and my elder brother, who had been bred a soldier, bore a commission in the King's service, at the commencement of the civil wars; and though very young, was soon distinguished for his bravery, to the no small satisfaction of my father, who gloried, and would willingly have bled, in the cause of monarchy.

“ Discord



"Discord quickly spread its desolating horrors through the kingdom; towns and villages were depopulated; while the insolence and rapacity of the soldiery, as each party was alternately victorious, struck the defenceless inhabitants with terror.

"Trembling for the safety of a beloved wife, my father conveyed her to his castle in Scotland, as a place of the greatest security, from its natural strength, its distance from the seat of war, and the strong attachment of his vassals to his person and family; where, placing her under the care of some trusty friends, he returned to his Royal Master; though my mother, anxious for his safety, used every argument her reason could suggest, mingling those arguments with all the endearments of affection, to dissuade him from his purpose.

"In this retirement I was born; and the first impressions my mind received, were those of sorrow. A prey to grief and anxiety;

harrassed by continual alarms; left to brood over painful apprehensions in almost entire solitude, my mother's health declined, and my infant vivacity was checked by her sighs; my buoyant spirits repressed by the settled melancholy which clouded her brow.

“My father, ardent in the cause he had espoused, and attached by personal intercourse to the monarch, continued among the most active friends of royalty. In the battle of Naseby, so fatal to the King's party, he commanded near his person; and, by accompanying him in his flight, saved him more than once from falling into the hands of his enemies. My brother was left dead on the field; my father saw him fall; and, charmed with his bravery, gloried in him, as a victim to the good cause.

“Young as I then was, I perfectly remember the arrival of that intelligence. My mother, overwhelmed with affliction, neglected to bestow on me her wonted caresses; and

and when I forced myself to her embrace, would press me to her bosom, while her tears bedewed my face; and when I enquired the cause of her grief, would only answer me by a fresh burst of sorrow.

“You will perhaps hardly credit, that this circumstance, even at that early period, raised in my mind some confused ideas of the horrors of war, and led my infant reflections to that subject; but I often remember, when seated on my mother’s knee, I have enquired “Why my brother was shot? Why the King wanted people to die? (for such a tale I had been told.) Whether he would one day have my father killed?” till my questions, begun by affection, and continued by awakened curiosity, have embarrassed her, and she has sent me away in anger. To this I impute my future enquiries after truth, and the opposition of my sentiments to those around me.

“After experiencing a variety of difficulties, my father, with his Royal Master, once more regained a place of safety, where they assembled the scattered remains of their fallen party, and deliberating on the best measures to be pursued, their affairs began again to wear a favorable aspect. But these pleasing appearances were of short duration; the duplicity of the King, which the manners of a corrupt court had rendered habitual, joined to his high idea of prerogative, and his known determination to restore it to the utmost extent whenever an opportunity offered, weakened the confidence of his disinterested friends; whilst the artful Cromwell, who generally knew what was passing in the royal camp, and how to make his advantage of it with the people, pushed his conquests with such vigour, that one place of strength after another falling into his hands, the King’s party became dispirited.

“In this critical situation of affairs, my father passed into Scotland, to raise fresh  
forces.



forces among his dependants ; and he soon brought into the field a small troop of highlanders, inspired with his own sentiments, and ready to shed their blood in defence of their Sovereign. He likewise negotiated with the covenanters, who professed their zeal for their King, but would not enter into any terms with him ; and he was forced to return to Charles without making any engagement with the Scotch.

“ Though zeal for the good cause was become the ruling principle of my father’s actions, it cost him a struggle to part with my mother, whose pallid cheek, and hollow eye, spoke declining health, and gave fearful alarms of a premature death.

“ With the small number of forces his friends could collect, Charles once again took the field ; but unsuccessful in every attempt, and in danger of falling into the hands of one or other of the Parliament’s Generals, which he exceedingly dreaded, my

father advised his passing into Scotland; he had ever been partial to that nation, and had no doubt but the sight of their Sovereign in distress would awaken their former affection, and induce them to place him on the throne, under restrictions less humiliating than he had reason to expect from his English subjects.

The council approved my father's scheme, and Charles, attended by a few friends, arrived in that kingdom. But he had soon reason to repent his confidence; and my father saw, with grief, that under the pretence of paying him respect as a King, they guarded him as a prisoner: Still, as they treated him with a shew of homage, he hoped they would be softened in his favor; but when he found that they had compromised with the Parliament, and had given up his person, his heart was agonized, he considered himself as the cause of his present misfortune, and would not have thought any sacrifice

sacrifice too great to expiate the fault he had undesignedly committed.

“ When the King was conveyed to London, my father prepared to follow him as a menial servant, for he was become too obnoxious, in his own character, to be permitted by the opposite party. It was in vain that his friends urged the imprudence of such a step; in vain that my mother, who had joined him the moment of his arrival in the kingdom, hung on his bosom, and presented her almost infant son; while my sister clung to his knee, and entreated him not to leave us. He was firmly resolved never more to quit his unfortunate Sovereign, and in the enthusiasm of his mind, almost wished to become a sacrifice, to soothe the anguish he felt, for having, by his persuasions, incautiously betrayed his Master.

“ From that time my father never quitted the King; when suspected in one disguise, and driven from his presence, he assumed

another, still deceiving the vigilance of those who had the custody of his person; and had often the pleasure of soothing the King's mind, when misfortune oppressed him, and cheering his spirits, when the mortifying insults of newly-acquired power, wounded his pride.

“He was present at the awful trial; and witnessed, with delight, the fortitude displayed by the Monarch in that moment: Nor did he forsake him in the last scene of his existence, but beheld the firm composure, with which Charles behaved on that trying occasion, with enthusiastic admiration.

“The misfortunes of Charles softened even his enemies; you will not therefore wonder that my father's affection should increase, or that he should view with detestation, his more fortunate, but not less ambitious, rival. Indeed his mind was constantly occupied in schemes to drive him from the throne, and restore the family of his



his prince.—But unable to put any of his plans in execution, he returned to the quiet of domestic life, after attending the Prince and Princess to the continent, placing them under the care of their mother, and exhorting his Friends there to wait with confidence for some favourable turn in affairs.

“My mother, now relieved from the anxious fears which had so long disturbed her rest, and soothed by the society and kind attentions of the man on whom her happiness was placed, soon regained her health, and her spirits became more than usually vivid, from the depression they had suffered. I seemed to awake to newness of life; for though we lived retired, on the wreck of my father's fortunes, yet pleasure animated every face in the castle; and scenes of festivity, to which I had been till then a stranger, now sometimes illumined its gloomy apartments.

“My

“My education became now the sole employment of my father.—As my mind expanded he endeavoured to enlarge my faculties, and soon taught me all he knew. He loved to dwell on the virtues, real and imaginary, of his Prince, wishing to inspire me with his own prejudice for monarchical power; insisting on its being the only government under which men could live secure; where alone order could be supported; where justice and morality would ever flourish. The people at large were, he said, without knowledge, to be governed by any bold leader who could work on their passions; and democracy he compared to a many-headed monster, imbecile from extension; cruel and vindictive from imbecility; without reason, judgment, or concord.

“I heard him with attention, yet his arguments did not always convince; and he has frequently been embarrassed by my questions. Anxious to form my judgement,

I read

I read all that had been written on the subject; endeavoured to make myself acquainted with the cause of dispute between the King and people; to acquire a perfect knowledge of the constitution of my country. Persuaded of the justness of his own sentiments, my father contented himself with pointing out the errors, and ridiculing what he termed the absurdities of those authors I read. Yet in my search after truth, his opinions lost the little weight they before had over my mind. My heart glowed with the love of freedom; I admired the daring spirits that could oppose arbitrary power. I loved the virtues, and longed to imitate the bold patriotism of a Hamden; though I regretted that individual ambition should have triumphed over such disinterested love of mankind, and pitied the monarch who had fallen the victim.

“ It was my father’s wish that I should be bred a soldier; but my mother, who had passed many years in solitude and sorrow  
white

while he toiled in the ensanguined field, and who still remembered, with lively affliction, the untimely death of my brother, earnestly opposed his designs ; indeed, my own mind shrunk from the profession ; it was not suited to my inclinations. I was, however, taught the use of arms, merely as a science of defence ; and practising under a father, whose first wish was to see me excel in military tactics, and who was well qualified to give instructions, I soon obtained some knowledge of the art.

“ After a few years passed in this peaceful employment, the hopes of the royalists again reviving, my father passed over once more to the continent ; and Charles, whom he soon landed in Scotland, immediately invested him with the command of some forces he had previously raised, and who waited the arrival of their leader.

“ I need not repeat to you, madam,” continued De Valcourt, “ the events that followed,



followed ; they are well known ; suffice it to say, my father, after escaping the battle of Worcester, laid a considerable time concealed in England ; a price had been set on his head, and he feared to venture home, or send us any intelligence, lest that should lead to a discovery of his retreat ; and my mother despaired of ever seeing him more, though strongly assured he was living, by some friends who had taken shelter with us ; when late one evening he came secretly into the castle.

“ Once again our hearts were filled with joy ; my mother, now her husband was safe, could embrace poverty with content. For myself I had no other ideas of happiness or misery but what flowed from the content or affliction of my parents, and we waited a favorable opportunity of leaving the kingdom.

“ This calm however was of short duration : Some spies of the Protector’s discovered, through all his disguise, my father’s return,

return, and a detachment was sent to besiege the castle. A centinel on guard observed the party coming over the distant mountains towards us, and giving the alarm, soon filled us with terror and consternation.

“My father had nothing to expect from the mercy of his enemies; he had offended beyond the hope of forgiveness; and he resolved to defend himself to the last extremity: He wished to have sent my mother and sister to a place of safety, but that was now impossible; in quitting the castle they must inevitably fall into the hands of the soldiers. He immediately called a council of his friends; they were still numerous; as many of the fallen party had found a refuge with us, they were all of my father’s opinion, and resolved to preserve their lives if possible, and, if not, to fall bravely.

“The castle was situated on a very steep hill, or rather mountain, surrounded by a deep ditch, and covered by a wall of immense  
thick-

thickness, which, tho' much impaired by time, was still able to stand a long siege. Every part of this ancient building was now carefully examined, and we worked night and day to complete the necessary repairs; my mother and sister, with the female domestics of the family, assisting in the labour. It was a moment of urgent necessity; life, liberty, and happiness were at stake; and hope would sometimes animate our minds with the prospect of success, and rouse us to inconceivable exertion in our work.

“ On the third day the troops had completely formed their camp in the valley below; when a herald's trumpet summoned to a parley. My father, with some chosen friends, appeared on the walls; but nothing less than unconditional surrender would satisfy the besiegers; nor would they allow time for deliberation on the hard conditions they proposed.

Provoked

“Provoked by their insolence, and already determined, my father returned a menacing answer: “Tell your general,” said he, “the brave De Valcourt will not submit to traitors and robbers; he expects neither justice nor mercy from those who spread desolation through the land: if he falls, it shall be in battle, not by the hands of the executioner; he will ever be found worthy his high reputation.”

“In an hour’s time the army was drawn up, and made an attempt on that part of the wall which appeared to them most vulnerable; but we defended ourselves with such irresistible ardour, that those who had advanced to the top of the mountain were driven back, and falling on their companions who followed, put them in confusion; numbers were slain, and they returned hastily to their camp.

“Though scarce fifteen years of age, my father would on that day have me fight by  
his



his side. My young heart fluttered at the dreadful din of war, while, with trembling hand, I discharged my piece; but he praised my courage, and exhorting me to remember for what I fought, my mind soon became more firm. This slight advantage encouraged our party, and they began to think our fortress, defended by desperate valour, would be found impregnable: But nothing could rouse the spirits of my mother; despair seemed to have chilled her faculties, and she awaited her fate with silent resignation. My father, too, had given up all hopes of escaping; he knew well the earnestness with which they fought his life, and meant to find death in the fight; and when his situation became desperate, to secure his family's safety by his own destruction.

“Among the varied recesses of the castle was a secret door, which led through a vaulted passage to a chapel belonging to an old convent, now in ruins. Through this subterraneous retreat he earnestly entreated  
his

his friends to provide for their own safety, should the fortress be at any time surprised, and during the first confusion, convey my mother and sister thither ; adding, “ When I am known to be dead, and I will not survive that day, my enemies will be less diligent in their search ; and as the ruins are at least a mile distant from this castle, and near the sea-shore, you may probably remain concealed there till you find an opportunity of escaping to France.” Then turning to me, who was present at this conversation, and grasping my hand, while the tear of paternal affection started to his eye, “ My son (said he) your understanding is above your years, and it is now, alas! early called into action. I cannot point out any plan for your future conduct ; it must be directed by the exigencies of the moment. To your care I commit your mother and sister, those dear ties which twine about my heart, and alone render death formidable to me. Under a loose stone, which I will shew you, is a small sum of money, that may bear your expences till  
you

you reach the chateau of my cousin Longueville, and to his care you will tell him I committed you with my dying breath. Our friends will aid you with their councils ; and your own judgment must decide what course to pursue, to obtain your future subsistence."

" I was so much affected by his solemn injunctions I had scarce power to express my hopes, that we should yet live many years together ; but he shook his head, and left me, saying, " remember what I expect from you."

" For six months the army lay before our walls, without coming to a decisive action, though our troops frequently sallied out, when slight skirmishes were fought. Our provisions at length began to grow low, as they had cut us off from all communications with the town, and our only supplies were obtained from the fishermen, by means of our subterraneous passage, through which our friends sometimes ventured ; but they were  
very

very inadequate to our wants ; and my father began to fear they meant to reduce us by famine. He dreaded the miseries of a protracted siege ; the gaunt looks of hunger ; the horror of a wife and children perishing for want, without the prospect of relief, and his fortitude forsook him.

“ But a reinforcement arriving, elate with recent conquest, not allowing them to wait for such tardy vengeance, they once more prepared for a general attack. They, however, gained but little advantage, though some of the turrets were beaten down, a small breach made in the walls. and one of the western towers entirely destroyed. Many of our friends had fallen in the engagement, and the courts were strewn with dead, whilst every thing bore marks of the late devastation.

“ The following morning the attack was renewed. Before we repaired to the breach, my father, taking me aside, said, “ My son,  
I fear



I fear we shall not now be long together ; I have discovered treachery within our walls, though I am not able to trace it to the source ; perhaps we meet for the last time ; if so, farewell."

" He then retired to an inner chamber. My mother flew to his embrace, and hung on his neck in motionless despair, while a sigh of deep anguish burst from his tortured heart, till unable longer to support the scene, he tore himself away, and returning to the charge, forgot in the noise of war, and his ardour for victory, every painful reflection.

" Some soldiers had been arrested under suspicion of corresponding with the enemy, early on that day ; and as it was now late, and they still continued to fight with impetuous valour, we thought every danger from secret machinations past. My father went from rank to rank encouraging his troops, and more than sharing the dangers and fatigues of the day, when just as he had said " Courage

for a little longer, my friends, and we shall be successful," a random shot pierced his left side. I saw him fall, and flew to his assistance, but was too late to receive his dying commands. The ball touched his heart and he expired immediately.

"His death was soon perceived, and the consternation it occasioned among the troops, checking for a moment their courage, they were beginning in that part to give way; but a friend stepping forward, gave the word of command, and they returned to the charge.

"I was preparing to convey the body to a chamber, when my mother, who wearied with anxious expectation, had quitted her retreat in search of intelligence, seeing my father's lifeless body borne through the court, rushed forward with impetuosity not to be restrained, calling, with frantic wildness, on her dead husband; and while I was vainly endeavouring to draw her from this scene of horror,

horror, the western gate was opened to the enemy, who rushed furiously in. The shouts of the soldiers who entered—the cries of those who fled—and the groans of those they beat down in their haste to gain the interior of the castle, completed the confusion already begun. I pressed forward, hoping at this moment to effect our escape; but before I could reach the hall, one of the soldiers, struck by the appearance of my mother, seized her by the arm. Prudence now forsook me, and aiming a blow at his head, laid him dead at my feet. I was instantly surrounded by numbers, when urged by rage and despair, I dealt death around with all my strength, while my mother vainly endeavoured to rush between me and the foe, till a stone from the wall striking her head, she fell on the earth. The blood flowed from the wound, and I saw her carried insensible away; while half frantic at the sight, I vainly endeavoured to cut a passage for myself, till weakened by loss of blood, exhausted by fatigue, and the contending passions that har-

raised my mind, I sunk senseless on the earth.

“ In this state of apparent death I lay, till the keen midnight air recalled my torpid faculties. I at first recovered only to a faint recollection of my fate, till, by degrees, all the horrors of my situation were fully present to my mind. The moon, half clouded, shed a faint feeble light, which, by discovering indistinctly the objects that surrounded me, rendered darkness more horrible. The loud wind whistling round the building, the faint groans of the dying, the mingled sounds of revelry and discord which issued from the castle, heightened the dreadful scene.

“ Agonized by the most painful apprehensions, I endeavoured to rise from the earth, but overcome by excessive weakness, unable to support my tottering frame, I sunk again. My face touched a human bosom; it was still warm, and a feeble sigh, the last effort of expiring nature, burst from the heart, when



when a death-like cold succeeded. A faint chillness now shuddered through me, while a cold dew covered my face. I started! to be thus entombed alive, was dreadful; and the energy of my feelings, giving momentary strength, I crept slowly along, till I reached the first gate: it was open—the centinels had left their posts, to mingle in the debauch of their comrades. I entered unperceived, and taking a lamp that stood in the hall, proceeded up the great staircase, along the corridor to my mother's apartments. All was silent; the echo of my own foot-steps alone interrupted the awful stillness.

“ In vain I searched the antique chambers; no human being appeared to cheer my heart; but floors stained with blood, and strewn with broken furniture, convincing me they had been visited by the soldiers, filled me with inexpressible concern.

“ Resolved to know at once the full extent of my misfortunes, and hoping some of

my friends might have escaped to the convent; I bound up my wounds with the linnen which lay scattered over the apartments; then taking up my lamp, with tottering steps, descended the narrow stairs that led to a grated chamber, whence the door opened on the secret passage. As I entered the cell the damp from the walls half extinguished my light, and it continued to burn feebly, while I held it up to discover the secret spring which unclosed the massy bolts of the door, through which I was to pass. At length having found it, I applied all my remaining strength to press the spring, but it would not yield to my weak efforts. I looked wildly round the prison—ah! thought I, how many wretches have found this a living grave; perhaps the hour of retribution is come, and I shall languish out the few remaining hours of my existence in this horrible dungeon.

“ Shuddering at my own ideas, I again attempted the spring, when a shriek from the opposite corner palsied my hand. Pausing  
ing

ing for a moment, I recovered my courage, and was cheered by this little incident—the cry was the language of distress, and no doubt proceeded from a friend.

“Pleased with the thought, I approached the spot, and discovered, to my infinite joy, Duncan, a favourite domestic, who had lived from infancy in the castle. It was with some difficulty, I could persuade the old man I was not a ghost. He had seen me fall, and concluding with my other friends, I was dead, had felt all the terror that the dread of supernatural appearances create, when he first raised his eyes to the spot where I stood. At length, being fully convinced I was the same individual being he had so often folded in his arms, he became composed.

“From him I learned, after listening to the tedious, but affecting narrative of age, that my mother had expired before she was brought in, and that Sir Algernoon Courcy, to secure the body from insult, had himself

conveyed it to the convent, where my sister followed with Colonel Leinster, while the soldiers were occupied in plundering the apartments ;—that my father's corps had been immediately seized by the enemy, and was now strongly guarded.—“I,” continued he, “ was left here to watch that no one approached to discover the fugitives, and thinking I heard a noise, incautiously shut the door that they had left open for my escape, and which I have since found it impossible to unclose.”

“ We applied our joint efforts, and the door quickly gave way, when we entered the passage, and carefully closing it after us, proceeded. Time had greatly impaired the roof, whose disjointed stones hung trembling over our heads, and in many places, the shattered fragments which had fallen impeded our way. My wounds, from the exertions, now bled afresh, and I was unable to move, but Duncan bearing me in his arms, we made what haste we could forward, and

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at length reached our friends, who were exceedingly rejoiced at my unexpected appearance. My sister sunk on my bosom, and we mingled our tears.

“ The sun, which now began to spread its cheering rays through our gloomy habitation, enabled us to discover the interior of the convent; where a few steps below the surface of the ground, we found a range of cells, at the end of which was a large room, where an oratory still stood. Here we resolved to fix our abode, as we should be secure from observation; and collecting some of the furniture, which time had not yet wholly destroyed, we decorated our wretched apartment. Colonel Leinster kindled a fire on the hearth, with some wood Duncan brought us, while Sir Algernoon, who had some knowledge of surgery, bathed my wounds: and in a few days they buried the remains of my beloved mother in the vault of the chapel.

“ We remained in this dreary place more than a month, not daring to remove while the army continued in the neighbourhood. Our provisions were procured in the night by Duncan ; and screened by darkness, my companions would sometimes venture at midnight, to wander through the desolated gardens of the convent. For myself, I was unable for some weeks to rise from my wretched couch ; my Louisa, my sister, attended me with the tenderest care, though her own health was daily declining.

“ Before the army left the country, they burned the castle to the ground ; the walls were destroyed, and a few cottages were the only vestiges that remained to trace the spot where ancient grandeur had raised it's lofty head—where the proud Laird had so long ruled with despotic sway. We often heard the footsteps of our enemies among the ruins ; who persuaded there were some persons concealed there, frequently visited the place, though

though, fortunately for us, they never discovered the steps which led to our dwelling.

“ It was impossible to embark for France without entrusting some of the cottagers with our design ; as soon, therefore, as I could walk, I went to a peasant, on whose fidelity I thought I could rely ; he received me with rapture, rejoicing that I had escaped from the general destruction. I told him our wish to procure a passage in some vessel to the continent : he promised to use all possible dispatch, and in a few days, faithful to his charge, procured a packet, the master of which agreed to land us at the nearest port in France.

“ The night before we embarked, while our friends were making some necessary arrangements, Louisa and myself visited the grave of our departed parent ; she had been laid in a coffin, whose inside casing being lead, had defied the hand of time ; but, whose inhabitant had long since mouldered into dust.

As we entered the vault our hearts sunk with painful recollections; my sister endeavoured to assume fortitude, though trembling with emotion. We advanced to the spot, then looking at each other in silent agony, without resolution to remove the covering, we remained motionless. At length, summoning a degree of courage, my heart was in reality a stranger to, I drew back the lid.— Though the body had imbibed putrefaction, the face still wore the same benevolent smile, which, when living, had animated the features. Louisa uttered a faint scream, but soon recovering, we took each a hand, and bathing it with our tears, remained some time in speechless anguish, when Louisa, dropping the hand she held, and pressing her lips to the cold forehead, in almost inarticulate sounds, cried, “Farewell! yet, a little while, and thy child will rest with thee in peace.”

“Unable longer to support this afflicting scene, I hurried her from the spot; and in a few



few days after our embarkation, we arrived at our destined port, without any unpleasant occurrence, except that my Louisa's health considerably [declined during our voyage; and on our landing she was so much reduced as to render it impossible to proceed.

"Sir Algernoon left us immediately, to seek his friends at Paris; but Leinster staid to share with me the painful task of attending our amiable Louisa. A few weeks, however, ended our cares, and consigned her to an untimely grave.

"Wholly engrossed by concern for my sister, and anxious to obtain her every alleviation medical skill could procure, my finances were exhausted; and I had not once thought of informing Monsieur Longueville of my arrival. Leinster assisted me with his purse while his stock lasted; but when the funeral expences were paid, our joint store amounted to little more than two guineas, and we had full two hundred miles to travel

vel in a foreign country. But the Colonel, accustomed to difficulties, with spirits not easily depressed, and a mind fruitful in resources, was not cast down; he communicated our distress to the priest of a neighbouring monastery, who kindly undertook to furnish us with supplies, by making our wants known to some of his patrons: he kept his word, and we set out amply provided for our journey.

“ We travelled expeditiously, and soon arrived at my cousin’s chateau; which, as he inherited it from a branch of my father’s family, still retained the name of De Valcourt. He received me with an open hospitality that quieted all my fears; a benevolent composure beamed on his face; the stormy passions seemed in him all subdued; regarding me with compassion, he wept over my tale of woe — which by interesting his feelings, soon won his affections, and I became, in a short time, the only object of his concern. He insisted on becoming the Colonel’s banker,

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er, till some change of affairs should restore him to his rights; and Leinster, after accepting a small sum, bade us adieu, and I parted with regret from this faithful friend.

“ Longueville treated me with paternal affection, soothing my wounded mind by every alleviation in his power; and grief began at length to subside into a pleasing melancholy. I could wander through the shades of the chateau, and weep the lovely interesting Louisa; lament the maternal bosom that nourished my infant years, and meditate the fatal end of a father I honoured. Mirth and joy were not in unison with my feelings, yet I was happy..

“ Fearing this pensive sadness would settle into habitual inanity, and choak all the energies of my mind, my cousin procured admission for me in the university of Arles. The days spent at this seat of learning, I regard as the happiest of my life; the stores of information, which here opened to my view,

view, filled me with delight; and in the pursuit of knowledge, I forgot my former sorrow. To medicinal studies I applied myself with serious avidity; delighting in the healing art; and as the amusement of my leisure hours, I sometimes wooed the muses with tolerable success.

“ Wholly occupied by my studies, and weaned from gaiety by my past misfortunes, I avoided the dissipated parties, in which many of my fellow-students passed their time, and though I became the subject of their ridicule, yet my mind was too pleasingly employed to be much affected by the efforts of their wit. Six years passed rapidly in this pleasing seclusion: my cousin, with whom I generally spent two months of every year, took pleasure in observing my improvement; and his praises animated my industry, while his kindness precluded every want.

“ I was at length called on to bid an eternal farewell to this last relative, this amiable friend;



friend ; all my former affliction was renewed when I consigned him to the grave ; I seemed a solitary being, left alone in the world. Absorbed in grief, I walked through the lonely apartment of the chateau, and spent whole days in the close-shaded forest that surrounded it, where listening to the wisdom of Longuville, I had so often lost the remembrance of every former evil ; its dark impervious shade suited well the gloom of my mind, which shunned the enlivening beams of noon, as they spread over creation a glow that mocked my desolate heart.

“ The friends of my cousin came to offer consolation, but their hearts were little interested ; it was to them the common routine of compliment, which ill-according with my bursting heart, I shut myself from society, and refused peevishly their offered kindness, till my faithful Duncan, who had in vain tried every other method to comfort me, sent for a Monsieur Beaumont, the early friend, and school-fellow of my departed Longue-

Longueville. Their hearts had ever been in unison—they had shared each other's confidence from the first dawn of reason; and his grief was nearly equal to my own. To him I could not refuse admittance: and as I could talk freely to him of our mutual loss, and indulge in his presence, every feeling of my heart, my mind became more tranquil, and his society restored me to comparative peace.

“As Longueville had left me his heir, I had no other pecuniary concerns than how to dispose of my wealth for the benefit of mankind, and my heart glowed at the prospect of independence. But these pleasing expectations soon vanished—my claim was put in litigation; the will wanted some of the necessary formalities to render it efficient in the eye of the law. My oponent was as nearly related to the deceased as myself, with the advantages of being born in the country, supported by the hand of power, and already possessed of considerable property.

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ty; while I, poor, an alien, unfriended, and unknown, was to support the contest. He was too, a young, dissipated, unprincipled man, who had been discarded from my cousin's favour for his vices; and any one less sanguine than myself would have foreseen the event; but though my judgment could discern all the difficulties, yet my feelings constantly listened to the suggestions of hope.

“By the advice of my friend Beaumont, I quitted my retreat for the gay city of Paris, where I had the opportunity of consulting the most able lawyers on my case.”

Here De Valcourt paused, as if unwilling to proceed; a crimson glow overspread his face, as his eye met Matilda's—then rising, with agitation, he cried, “Would to God I could forget that period of my life to which my history is now advancing, or that truth would allow me to pass it over in silence. It is the first wish of my heart to secure your esteem, but I cannot by a false gloss conceal my er-

rors ;

rors; the candour of my narrative is all I have to depend on, and must abide your sentence."

Interested by De Valcourt's tale, the great clock had struck twelve, (an hour unusually late for the family at the castle to sit) the loud roaring of the wind, as it shook the old casements and whistled through the decayed tapestry too, had passed unheeded, when they were suddenly roused from this mute attention, by the loud ringing of the great bell, and the trampling of horses' feet in the court. Surprise created a momentary terror; but Lady Mountshannon, convinced she had nothing to fear, while surrounded by her faithful domestics, hastened to the gate, when a stranger enquiring if he was at the castle of the Lord Mountshannon, and being answered in the affirmative, begged a night's lodging, as he had lost his way, and feared to proceed in a strange country, through the increasing tempest. He was immediately

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announced as Sir Charles Ormond; and Lady Mountshannon, who had seen him when a child, gave him a polite reception. After taking a slight repast, beds were prepared for him and his attendants; the family retired, and De Valcourt's history was postponed.

## CHAP. IV.

He mourn'd for man, and virtue lost,  
 And seem'd to feel of keen remorse the wound,  
 Pondering on former days, by guilt engross'd,  
 Or in the giddy storm of dissipation toss'd.

BEAUTY.

AT breakfast, the following morning, the party were enlivened by the sprightly sallies of Sir Charles. • He described the follies of the court with sarcastic humour, and relating numberless little anecdotes of the great world, interesting to those who live secluded, and which he rendered entertaining by the gaiety of his manners; while generous sentiments, occasionally mingling with his discourse, gave them no mean opinion of his heart, and increased their admiration of his talents.

Matilda listened with pleasure to his amusing tales, tho' the levity of his conversation,

sation, and the coarse allusions he frequently made, created some disgust. When the meal was ended, Ormond's situation became uneasy; pleased with the inmates of the castle, attracted by the novelty of the scene, and interested by the simplicity of every thing around him, which formed a pleasing contrast with the factitious manners produced by studied etiquette, he wished to prolong his stay; yet knew not how, as he had only solicited a night's shelter.

Lady Mountshannon, observing the regret with which he seemed to prepare for his departure, relieved his embarrassment, by pressing him to spend a few days at the castle; while he, bowing his acknowledgement of her attention, joyfully accepted her invitation.

De Valcourt, who had not been present at breakfast, was, before the dinner hour, introduced to Sir Charles, by Lady Mountshannon, who spoke of him as an amiable man,

man, who had long been an exile from his country. At the name of De Valcourt, Sir Charles started; but soon recovering himself, he advanced, and taking his hand, desired to be reckoned among the number of his friends. "Our fathers (said he) were associates; and I hope, from this moment, the same intimacy will be renewed by their sons."

The afternoon was passed in animated conversation, and the evening concluded with a rustic ball; the music was played in a covered gallery; and the villagers, in their best attire, assembled to join in the festivity. Compelled by politeness, Sir Charles offered his hand to Lady Mountshannon; while he reluctantly beheld De Valcourt, forgetting his weakness, lead Matilda to her place among the dancers. Mountford selected from the throng a blooming partner, who, pleased with his attentions, exerted all her powers to excel her companions. Care was banished, and every face was smiling with joy,



joy, except Sir Charles Ormond, who darted looks of anger at De Valcourt, as he followed the light-hearted Matilda through the dance; but this passed unnoticed by Lady Mountshannon, who, attentive to the general accommodation of her guests, had not leisure to observe individual discontent; nor would it have been easy to discover that of Sir Charles, hid as it was by his natural politeness. At length, finding herself fatigued, and fearing that longer exertion might injure the health of De Valcourt, she declined dancing; and presenting the delighted Sir Charles to Matilda, drew away the Marquis to a seat, where she bade him remember that he was still an invalid, and commanding him not to stir during the rest of the evening, seated herself by his side, endeavouring to compensate, by her conversation, the severe restraint she laid him under. But her efforts were vain; while he silently acquiesced in all she said, his eyes were fixed on Matilda, whom he contemplated with admiration, tho' not without some painful emotions,

which increasing as he observed the assiduous attentions of the man he dreaded as a rival, he became wholly insensible to every other object.

Matilda, though not strictly handsome, was yet highly interesting ; her figure, rather above the middle size, was formed with exact symmetry ; her dark blue eyes were penetrating and severe ; but the long silken eyelash, through which they shone, softening their lustre, gave a melting sweetness to their expression ; her nose inclined to the roman, and tho' it was rather too large for female beauty, added strength to her countenance ; while the benevolence that played round her mouth, ameliorating its strong character, formed a happy mixture of feminine softness, with the energies of reflection and a cultivated understanding, that dignified her appearance, and at once excited love, and demanded respect. Unacquainted with fashions, her dress was the simple effect of her own taste ; it was a robe of white cambric,

bric, hanging loose from the shoulders, fastened only by a belt, with a silver clasp, below the bosom, drawn up on the left side by a small bow of green ribbon; and her hair, which hung carelessly in her neck, was slightly ornamented with the same.

Sir Charles, who had received her as his partner with rapture, spoke his admiration of her person, and praised her mental acquirements in terms of warm, but respectful compliment; practising all the little arts he was master of, to excite her attention. In vain were his efforts: her eye constantly wandered to the seat of De Valcourt, while his compliments and attractions were equally lost; till, observing the anxiety and fixed attention with which the Marquis regarded her, her spirits sunk; she mistook the figure, created confusion, and blushing, stammered out an apology, and was about to leave her partner, that she might join De Valcourt, and enquire the cause of his uneasiness; but Sir Charles, whose vanity had been

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peiqued.

piqued by her coldness, took her hand, and affecting a look of sorrow, entreated to know in what he had been so unhappy as to offend her.

Matilda, who would not willingly have inflicted pain, assured him he had never, in the smallest instance, offended; on the contrary, she felt herself indebted to his politeness.

“ Ah! then, madam,” cried he, with a still more dejected air, “ you consider me as an intruder. I have remarked with pain, the change in your conduct since I have had the honour of dancing with you, and will no longer obtrude on you such irksome society. Happy De Valcourt! he can inspire your heart with affection, and may be insensible to every other evil.”

Surprised and mortified at this insinuation concerning De Valcourt; and conscious, that while yielding to her own feelings, she had been guilty of injustice to Sir Charles, by  
depriv-



depriving him of his amusement, she endeavoured to assume her usual vivacity, and laughing at his serious countenance, desired him, if he did not wish to quit his partner, to lead her back to the dance, as she had a little recovered her fatigue, and would now endeavour to do his dancing more justice.

Without noticing the inconsistency of her conduct, he thanked her for her condescension, and again joining the dance ; Matilda affected to be gay, but dissatisfied with herself, and anxiously concerned for De Valcourt, who, since the observations of Sir Charles, she had not dared to approach, or even look at, she could not regain her cheerfulness ; 'tis true her feet moved with vivacity ; but the pleasure that sparkled in her eye and animated her features, was fled.

The dance at length finished ; and Matilda would have hastened to De Valcourt, but Sir Charles determined not to lose her for that evening at least, led her to the sup-

per room ; and she had only time in passing, to say, in a softened tone of voice, “ De Valcourt, are you ill ? ”

But tortured by jealousy, and agonized at the preference he fancied given to his rival, he turned from her, uttering only some indistinct words ; and Sir Charles, at that moment, hurrying her along, she was left in a state of suspense, almost as painful as were the feelings of De Valcourt. Yet she hoped he would seat himself next her at supper, and calm her fears ; but he took the opposite end of the table, determined not to listen to the conversation of Sir Charles, lest the irritability of his temper should betray him into some unwarrantable expressions of anger.

Pride now supported the spirits of Matilda. The neglect of De Valcourt would have been too painful for endurance, had not the consciousness of his injustice roused her resentment ; and Sir Charles, who saw the workings of her mind, endeavoured to en-  
crease

crease her anger, while he exerted all his powers to render himself agreeable.

The peasants, who had a table spread for them at the lower end of the room, were no sooner seated, than giving loose to their animal spirits, aided by the joy of the moment, they became almost vociferous in their mirth; yet Matilda, wholly unsophisticated, enjoyed their vulgar pleasure. It was delightful to her to see so many of her species happy; benevolence was the strong feature of her character, and she had mixed too little with the world to have become fastidious.

But her pleasing sensations vanished, as often as her eye involuntarily turned on De Valcourt, in whose face the distress of his mind was strongly depicted. Resentment soon subsided, and pity for the uneasiness which visibly agitated his features succeeded; yet she could not account for his capricious conduct; he had ever seemed to be pleased with her society, and soothed by her

attentions ; and why he should now so studiously avoid her, she could not comprehend.

Urged by compassion and the warm affection she was unconsciously cherishing, Matilda once more before she retired, approached De Valcourt, to enquire the cause of his uneasiness, and, if possible, to sooth his mind to peace.

But he, whose jealousy had increased almost to frenzy, turning on her a look of mingled rage and despair, cried, “ Ah ! do not insult me with your pity, madam. I am already sufficiently humbled ; I feel the distance at which fortune has placed me—and know the superior claims of the man to whom I must yield ; yet I cannot endure to think of it. I cannot now listen to you, or owe to your benevolence alone, attentions it would be my glory to merit ;” then abruptly quitting her, he hurried out of the apartment.

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In vain on her pillow did she attempt to solve the mystery of De Valcourt's conduct, conscious of the high esteem she entertained for him ; the idea that he was jealous of her preferring Sir Charles did not once enter her mind. She rose to take her morning walk ; and De Valcourt, who had passed a sleepless night, regretting the impetuosity of his temper, and forming a thousand apologies for his behaviour the preceeding evening, was already in the garden. He saw Matilda enter, but humbled by a sense of his own weakness, he wanted courage to join her ; and turning into another walk, suffered her nearly to reach the last avenue to the castle, before he ventured to approach ; then, trembling and confused, he attempted to stammer out an apology ; but unable to connect a sentence, he stood silent and abashed. The feelings of De Valcourt were instantly communicated to Matilda,—who, though she ardently wished to know what had occasioned his vexation, wanted power to enquire. She held out her hand in token of friendship, when

mutually oppressed and embarrassed, they walked silently home.

The family were assembled in the breakfast-parlour. De Valcourt led Matilda to a chair—while Sir Charles, with a sarcastic smile, observed that the cool breeze of morning, by giving an additional glow to her cheek, had increased those charms he had before found sufficiently dangerous; then turning to De Valcourt, he congratulated him on the recovery of his health, declaring he ought no longer to be considered as an invalid, who could dance away the night, yet rise untired, to enjoy the morning air.

When breakfast was over, a walk was proposed. The sun shone bright—the sky was unclouded; and Matilda, wishing to lead the party to the walk, which, by deceiving her eye, had preserved De Valcourt—they readily consented. The winds of October had shaken from the trees some of their foliage, and through the opening made by their  
naked

naked branches, the surrounding country was frequently visible. The company often stopped to admire the beautiful scenery; and though it had, in the eye of Matilda, lost much of the romantic enchantment, with which, when impervious to the rays of the sun, her imagination had decked it, yet it was still delightful; and the recollection of past circumstances—the conversation of De Valcourt, as she leant on his arm—and the rustling music of the ripened foliage, as it gently fell to the ground, filled her mind with high-wrought sensations.

From contemplating the beauties of nature, they were insensibly led to the God of nature; when their thoughts taking a still wider range, they discoursed of another world.

Sir Charles, who professed himself a free-thinker, argued strongly against its existence.

But De Valcourt, who could not think of annihilation without pain, exclaimed with fervor, "There must be an hereafter; man was not formed with such comprehensive powers of mind and memory—such capability of judging and comparing, merely to run through a few short years, and then sink into eternal oblivion. It would be better to exist in pain and sorrow, than to lose all sense of being."

Matilda gazed on him with delight, as he uttered sentiments so congenial to her own; and pleased to continue the subject, she said, "My mind has often found delight, as my imagination has fondly pictured the happiness of a future state, when I have thought it would consist in increased, and still increasing intellectual enjoyment; that the stores of knowledge would be continually opening to our view, without the possibility of being exhausted—and our minds, free from every grosser alloy, would enjoy pure and unmixed delight,



delight, in the uninterrupted communication of intelligence."

De Valcourt involuntarily pressed the hand of Matilda, while, with more than usual animation, she spoke her glowing feelings.

Sir Charles smiled—but his smile was mingled with contempt. He complimented too—but tired of a conversation grown too serious for him, he endeavoured to disconcert the romantic moralist, by a coarse double entendre; which, fortunately for her, she did not comprehend.

Their walk had been long, and the company returned much fatigued to dinner; till recovering their spirits after the repast, and music being resorted to, they performed a little concert. Matilda sat down to her harp, and sang some favourite Scotch airs, with that native simplicity which touches the heart. Lady Mountshannon accompanied her on the harpsichord; Mountford played  
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the bag-pipe; while De Valcourt and Sir Charles took each a violin—and they did not separate till late in the evening.

Several days had passed in these pleasing amusements, when Sir Charles, compelled by necessity, one evening took his final leave, having ordered his horses to be got ready by day-break the next morning; and De Valcourt, who had promised to accompany him on the first stage of his journey, said he should have the honour of returning in the evening, when he would intrude a few days longer on the hospitality of Lady Mountshannon, that he might be benefited by her counsels in the present conjuncture of his affairs.

The following day was passed by Matilda in anxiously anticipating the pleasures of the evening—but no De Valcourt arriving, her heart sunk, when, at a late hour they retired to rest. He however appeared at breakfast next morning with elevated spirits. He had

met

met on the road, his faithful Duncan, who he feared had perished, and rejoiced in once more recovering the good old man.

The whole family now expressing their impatience to hear the conclusion of De Valcourt's history, he again proceeded.

“ On my arrival in Paris, I felt all the torture of suspense; I had tasted the sweets of independence, and could not endure the thought of sinking again into obscure poverty.

“ As the Marquis de Valcourt, and heir of Longueville, every gate was open to receive me—every tongue was loud in professions of friendship; but I knew too much of the world to mistake this for personal esteem. I loved society, was pleased with refinement, and my mind had not attained sufficient strength to relinquish the enjoyments of life without a pang. I endeavoured to banish the  
painful

painful sensations which reflection too frequently roused in my mind.

“ In this state, I flew to dissipation ; its delights were intoxicating to one whose only wish was to avoid thought ; and I soon entered into all the pleasures, which in a gay city like Paris, offer their allurements to the youthful heart.

“ In this thoughtless career, I became acquainted with some young men of fashion. Their minds were of a superior order—they possessed genius—were *bon vivants*—and though corrupted by general example, and the early indulgence of selfish passions, they loved the theory of virtue, and would often dwell on the praises of wisdom. I could enter their society with less ceremony than was necessary to introduce me to more respectable company. With them, forgetting “ the laws delay,” I could laugh away the jocund hours ; and I was soon initiated into new scenes of debauchery. At first, I  
started



started at their corrupt practices, and shrunk from the near approach of vice ; but they laughed at my folly—ridiculed my prejudice with such keen sarcasm, such lively raillery, that I was soon ashamed to defend my principles. Indeed their arguments in favour of vice were specious. Man, they said, was born for happiness ; had passions given him for his gratification — though selfish priests, to preserve their power, would shut him from enjoyment, and terrify his imagination by a bugbear.—And then exposing the hypocrisy of some characters I had been taught to revere, my virtue began to relax. I doubted if moral excellence were more than a phantom, raised by my own imagination ; and resolved to welcome pleasure in whatever form she appeared ; unmindful, that the man who lives only for himself, is shut out from all the enjoyments of benevolence, and lost to all the pleasures arising from expansion of heart ; that he exchanges for the low gratifications of sense, the pure delights of wisdom.

“ Beau-

“ Beaumont warned me of my danger; but, though I felt the force of his counsils, I wanted resolution to follow his advice. Yet I made some faint efforts to return to the path of rectitude I had quitted, in which, I believe, I should have succeeded, had not my friend, at that time been called to a distant part of the kingdom, on very important business.

“ When left wholly to myself, I again plunged into all my former errors. Among the females to whom I was introduced by my gay companions, was a Signora Romanzie, a woman of some personal attractions, whose wit rendered her the object of desire to all the dissipated men of Paris. To visit her was the ton—her house was always crowded by all who pretended to fashion. Insipidity and dullness were banished in her presence—she could keep her company in a roar of merriment, or say trifles with so enchanting an air, as to give them importance by her manners—could melt with softness,

or glow with heroic ardour—be gay or serious, as suited the disposition of her guest, or the part she had to act.

“ On my first interview she received me with the most flattering distinction. I paid liberally for my entertainment, as my stock of ready cash was still pretty large ; and on the renewal of my visit, she treated me with still greater attention. Though I knew her to be a woman of intrigue — artful from profession — and on the watch to entangle the unwary in her snares, yet I was weak enough to be pleased with this distinction. She saw my folly, and practised a thousand little arts to lull my prudence : she was suddenly grave and thoughtful, dressing her face in sorrow, to give interest to her features ; and as she sang and played some soft Italian airs, a gentle sigh heaved her bosom ; when my eye, meeting her's, she turned away with well-affected modesty. I was not fool enough to suppose myself beloved ; yet I was flattered—my senses yielded to the infatuation, and

and I gave way to passion fostered by myself, even against my better judgment. I soon became her devoted slave; while, to enhance the value of her favours, she created some delay; and in my hours of reflection, I resolved to avoid this connection, which I could not help regarding as degrading. But she knew how to command my passions, and I became the complete dupe of her cunning. In defiance of public censure, I took up my abode under the same roof with my charming Signora; and to oblige her, formed my establishment in a very expensive style. We gave *les petits soupers*, and our house was resorted to by all the *demireps* of fashion.

“ My law suit, which had passed through several courts, was still undecided; nor had I any hope of its coming to a conclusion; while thus in the gay dream of licentiousness, I wasted my finances and destroyed my health; till the loud clamours of my creditors awaked me to recollection; and I found the little stock I could call my own, inadequate-



inadequate to satisfy their demands. I had no resource now but by borrowing money at exorbitant interest, on my expected possessions; and this I resolved never to do.

“ To have given up my connections, and have waited in private the issue of the law’s decision, would have been a safe and easy remedy : my reason suggested the plan, but I had lost that reliance on myself which conscious rectitude produces; and so strongly had the artifices of Romanzie fascinated me, that I fondly fancied I had interested her heart, and that she would consent to retire with me.

“ To her, therefore, I applied, and told the artless tale of my distress. She heard me to an end in silence; then affecting to laugh at my scruples, accused me of cruelty in wishing to abridge her pleasures; talked of the sacrifices she had made for me; and at length, by tears, flattery, entreaties, and every other blandishment she was mistress of,

of, conquered my reason, and I yielded to her persuasions.

“ Gradations in vice are swift and almost imperceptible. It is from the first advances in the paths of error we should guard our hearts. We generally enter on vicious pursuits with reluctance; and it often needs the aid of sophistry to deck its paths with flowers, and cover the thorns beneath; or the more powerful assistance of a mind ill at ease, regretting the past, or dreading the future, to plunge us in; but when once entered, the descent is slippery—we lose our hold on virtue and self-esteem, and sink precipitately into the gulf beneath. I borrowed various sums: but my expences were now so great, they served only for a temporary supply, and I was constantly embarrassed.

“ My companions observing my chagrine, questioned me of the cause, which, when I explained, they wondered I should be without resources, possessed, as they were pleased

to

to say I was, of talents and address. I did not at first comprehend their meaning, till they led me to the gaming-table, where I soon became acquainted with all the deception, trick, and manœuvre, which constitute the character of a gamester. For some time I continued to frequent these haunts, to be myself alternately the plunderer and plundered—to see the wealth of nations tottering on a die—to see sharpers and princes, highway-men and ministers of state, mingle in one heterogeneous mass—to be one day possessed of thousands, and the next penniless.

“ But I was not yet arrived at that state of depravity which could render this mode of life tolerable to me. My health declined—my mind tortured by remorse, lost all its active powers; abhorring myself, and shrinking from reflection, I became fretful and peevish, and the caresses of my still charming Signora alone had power to sooth my irritated feelings.

“ I had

" I had not passed many weeks in this painful situation, when I received notice that the final decision of my cause would take place in a few days. The lawyers encouraged me with hope; and I sat indulging those pleasing sensations, and forming resolutions to direct my future conduct by virtue, when I was one evening surprised by the introduction of a stranger. He came from my opponent to offer me a yearly annuity, if I would sign over my right of inheritance to him, and withdraw my suit, assuring me, at the same time, that should this application fail, his employer had taken the means to secure a decision in his favour.

" I rejected the proposal with disdain, while he vainly endeavoured to mould me to his purpose, till finding me resolute, he hastened out of the house before I thought of securing him as an evidence. I then followed him into the street, but he had mingled with the crowd, and was out of sight.

" Bursting



“ Bursting with rage, I went to the houses of those friends I had neglected, determined to expose the conduct of the man I contended with—but my own character was now so branded with infamy, my story gained little credit—I knew not the man who made me the proposal ; and it was in vain that I repeated all the minute circumstances ; my tale was considered as a forgery, invented and propagated to prejudice my adversary’s cause before his judges. How was I fallen—of what guilt was I now thought capable. I shuddered at the thought, and with a heavy heart appeared the following morning in court.

“ It was late in the day before the cause was decided, when I saw myself stripped of all my property—reduced in a moment to indigence—and deeply involved in debt: yet so much did I abhor myself for my past conduct — so painful were the impressions made on my mind by the scenes I had lately witnessed, that I determined to forsake my

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former errors, and by applying myself to some useful profession, not only provide for my present wants, but restore to my creditors the sums I had wasted in folly and vice.

“ From Romanzie I could not separate without pain; and though I knew she would not share my poverty, and considered the parting with her, as the first step towards my reformation, yet I thought habit had created in her bosom some regard for me—that she would pity my misfortunes, and part from me with regret; my mind was soothed with the thought, that there was yet one being who could feel an interest in my concerns, and I returned to my house to pass one more night in her society—to arrange my affairs—dispose of my rich furniture and costly wardrobe, before I bade farewell to the gay world for ever.

“ I rang the bell; the servant who opened the door was confused; I asked in what apartment I should find her mistress? She hesitated

hesitated and replied, she believed her mistress was out, but would go and inquire. My jealousy was fired; I pushed furiously by, and hurrying up stairs, was surprised to hear sounds of mirth in Romanzie's apartment. I stopped a moment, when I heard a man's voice say, "Fear not, he will never return here—depend upon it he is ere now many miles from Paris; he has too much reason to fear a prison if he remains another night within the city walls; and should he be so hardy, I have taken care to prepare his creditors to place him in safe custody."

"I waited not to hear more, but bursting into the room—judge of my surprise and indignation, to find the man who had deprived me of my cousin's fortune, toying with my mistress, already a favoured lover. Though my attachment had ever been void of esteem, I did not believe her heart so very mercenary; and wounded by the events of the day, my soul was stung to madness by this last mortification. Prudence and every other  
G 2 feeling

feeling but revenge, at that moment forsook me.

“ She received me with the most insulting indifference ; wondered at my intrusion and ungentleman-like conduct ; till stopping her short, I said. “ ’Tis well, madam ; go on, for you are below my resentment ; but you, Sir,” continued I, turning to my rival, “ will not refuse to give satisfaction for the wrongs you have done me. If you have spirit to defend yourself, follow me—here are pistols, take your choice.”

“ He obeyed, and without further precaution, wholly unattended, we hurried to a retired spot : we fired, and he fell. I cannot, even at this distance of time, think of the horrors I felt at that moment, without shuddering. I flew to his assistance—supported him in my arms ; he appeared in agonies, but unable to speak, he rested a dead weight on my shoulder ; while I, vainly endeavouring to stop the blood, was presently surrounded



rounded by officers of the police, whom the Signora had alarmed immediately on our quitting the house.

“ I was now conveyed to prison, and left to darkness and despair. My fancy was disturbed with images of death, and the man, who an hour before had excited my hatred, was now the object of my tender solicitude; all the wrongs he had done me vanished; I could have knelt and implored his pardon. Every other consideration was absorbed in the dreadful thought of having taken the life of a fellow-creature; and I seemed borne down with the weight of my own guilt. My life, if prolonged, would now be a series of wretchedness; no future good could banish the dreadful idea from my bosom, that I was a murderer; I could have been content to linger out a long life, groaning under poverty, contempt, and every species of evil imagination could invent, to have recalled the last hour.

“ In this melancholy state I passed some weeks without one soothing reflection to calm my agonized heart. The dungeon where I was confined, admitted but little air; and the light that entered it was by a small aperture in the wall, borrowed from another cell; and as the men who daily brought my allowance of miserable food remained obstinately silent respecting the fate of my adversary, though I frequently besought them with tears to tell me, if he were yet alive—I had no doubt but he had expired of his wounds, and I was reserved for the sentence of the law, when my sufferings would be concluded by an ignominious death, as his relations were powerful, and I had no witness of the transaction; while the Signora would be at liberty to give what turn she pleased to my conduct.

“ Arming my mind to appear as a criminal in a court of justice, and endeavouring to collect fortitude sufficient to enable me to relate the truth in my defence; for on that  
alone,

alone, I determined to rely—I was one day surpris'd by the agreeable intelligence, that the wounds of my antagonist were healed—and that I was at liberty. My fetters were instantly struck off, and, led through the interior of the prison, I once more breathed the healthful air.

“Eased from a load of misery—again restored to freedom—allowed the unconstrained motion of my limbs—enjoying the exhilarating sight of my fellow-mortals—basking in the open air—and gazing on the great source of light, my spirits mounted, I forgot my cares, and no longer remembered with regret, I had lost those luxuries, on which I once set so high a value. But it is only in the power of him, who like me, has sunk under the torture of remorse; like me, has been deprived of human converse, light, and air, pent within a narrow cell; and like me, in a moment, found himself restored to all the privileges of man, to form an adequate idea of my joy. My eyes moved with rapture  
G 4 from

from object to object; and as I lightly bounded along, "Man," said I, "has within himself all the sources of happiness; blessed with liberty, his being is delightful to him; in the exertion of his faculties he may surely find the means of subsistence, and more than that vitiates the taste, corrupts the understanding, and renders him the slave of appetite.

"Thus pleasing myself with the fond idea, that the future would produce happiness untasted before, and forming visionary schemes, whereby my talents might procure me honest independence, I walked towards Paris. But scarce had I entered its gates, when I was arrested at the suit of one of my creditors; and as I could not find bail, conveyed to prison.

"My situation was, however, more tolerable now I had lost the apprehensive guilt of murder, and had only confinement to afflict me.

"The



“ The following day I was visited by my faithful servant Duncan, whom I had left at the chateau, and who, driven from thence by its new lord, had been seeking me for some weeks past in the city. Our meeting was affecting; the old man wept for my misfortunes; and I, who had long been unused to such kindness, was soothed by it. I sent him to some of my companions, who immediately came to my prison, and exhorting me not to be cast down, left me, to go and dispose of my furniture, that they might set me at liberty. The Signora, however, had cleared my house, leaving only my books and papers with the servants.

“ Humanity never wholly forsakes, even the worst of beings, and these men were rather the slaves of circumstances, than vicious from inclination. Unable to return to me with such unpleasing intelligence, they spent the remainder of the day in raising the sum necessary for my discharge; and at night came to inform me they had satisfied the

man at whose suit I was a prisoner. But as there were already several actions lodged against me, I was compelled to remain in custody.

“ It was in vain I promised my creditors, if they would free me from prison, to devote my time and talents to the discharge of my debts ; they were inexorable. In vain too, that I applied to some of those persons, who, on my arrival at Paris, had proffered me their friendship, to soften my creditors ; my character, they said, was so notorious, they could not interest themselves in my concerns, without sharing my disgrace ; and thus was I left to perish.

“ My situation now seemed hopeless ; but the firmness my mind had gained amidst the buffets of adverse fortune, was not to be shaken. Resolving to apply with industry, to some means to procure liberty, I immediately set myself to correct for the press, the poems, which in happier hours I  
had

had written to appease the cravings of an ardent imagination. The bookseller was liberal, and paid me a handsome sum for the copy, which went to liquidate my debts.

“Duncan alone remained my faithful friend and companion ; he constantly worked in the city all day, and at night returned to share with me his little earnings ; it was with reluctance I partook of his hard earned gains, but he pressed it with such earnestness—his heart seemed so much interested in his request, I was obliged to comply, that I might not add to his sorrow ; while the good old man had, without my knowledge, disposed of the sum he had saved in my service, to satisfy my creditors.

“My book, which was very successful, soon ran through several editions. Encouraged by this, I attempted a fresh composition. Physic and anatomy had been my favourite studies when at college, and I now endeavoured to methodise my ideas, and  
G 6 publish

publish the improvements, my close investigation at the time had suggested.

“ As my book was written in the plainest style, almost wholly devoid of technical terms, it was universally read, and proved to me a very profitable production, though it drew on me the hatred of the profession; and in less than a month, several pamphlets appeared, filled with invectives against its author, for his daring innovations. This soon made me popular; and what I afterwards published was eagerly purchased.

“ Successful as the productions of my pen had hitherto been, and carefully as I had applied the various sums to the use of my creditors, I was still considerably in debt, and found that years of labour would be insufficient to repay what had been squandered in a few months. I sickened at the thought of protracted confinement; yet as it was from my own exertions alone I could hope for relief,



lies, I endeavoured to arm my mind with patience.

“ Beaumont now returned, and I wrote the moment I knew of his arrival in Paris, a short account of my conduct during his absence. Above disguise, I attempted not to palliate my errors ; yet anxious to be again admitted to his friendship, I painted my change of sentiment with all the energy of feeling. I had spent more than a year in virtuous activity, had found it congenial to my nature, and could depend on the stability of my principles ; for though surrounded by the gloom of a prison—in danger of perishing for want, should any accident deprive me of my present powers of mind, yet I felt comparative happiness, when opposed to my sensations during the months I rioted in dissipation, and revelled in luxury.

“ For some days my hopes were high, I thought Beaumont would gladly restore me to his affections, and foster returning virtue :  
but

but when weeks passed without tidings—when I knew he had refused admittance to my faithful servant, my spirits failed—the torpor of despair seized my faculties ; I sat whole days absorbed in gloomy reflections, and could no longer pursue my usual avocations. I seemed an outcast from society, who had no longer any duties to perform ; to the only person interested in my welfare I was a burden—depriving him of the comforts his age required, life had lost its charms—for what then, should I prolong my wretched existence ? These thoughts would, spite of myself, continually intrude, and though often repressed, incessantly returned to darken my melancholy hours.

“ It was after a day of unusual heaviness, while Duncan, who had returned from his labour, was using all the arguments his untutored mind could suggest, to rouse me from the lethargy into which I had fallen, that the jailor entering my apartment, told me I was free. I almost doubted my powers of hear-  
ing.

ing, and made him repeat his agreeable intelligence several times, before I could persuade myself it was true. I then quitted my prison, but with very different sensations from those I felt, when released from my first confinement. I had felt the pangs of disappointment, and hardly thinking myself now safe, I expected every minute, some new adventure would plunge me again into misery. My fears, however, were groundless, and I remained in perfect safety.

“ As I had no doubt but I owed my liberty to the friendship of Beaumont, I went to thank him for his generosity, but was refused admittance. He thought my return to virtue proceeded from the pressure of painful circumstances, not the conviction of my judgment, and resolved to banish me his presence.

“ My works, which now began to be known, not only procured me general respect, but the friendship of some persons of worth

worth and talents. My former companions flocked round me; I had, in my gayer moments, contributed to their pleasures, and given zest to their enjoyments; and my society they considered an acquisition: besides, my writings were now every where talked of, and their vanity would have been gratified by my acquaintance. But my sentiments were changed; my principles founded on experience, were not to be shaken by their wit; my love of virtue was no longer the ebullitions of youthful fancy, which would shrink before the shafts of ridicule, the blasts of disappointment, or the allurements of pleasure. I endeavoured to convince them, that the delights of reason were superior to those of sense; but failing in my attempts, we parted.

“ I lived now in the country, on the produce of my literary labours, and became an enthusiastic lover of nature; while in the contemplation of it, my heart expanded with benevolence towards my species. In my progress



progress through vice, I had seen man a degraded being—had seen him practising mean arts to impose on his fellows; yet my own bosom glowed with the love of justice; I could not injure the happiness of another, without myself feeling the wound—and I had seen the same love of justice, the same regard for the feelings of others, in characters thought wholly degraded, when under the influence of compassion, the mind had been thrown from its habitual bias, and left to the impressions of nature.

“Anxious to ameliorate the condition of mankind—to encrease their source of rational delights; I observed them attentively in every state, and could not help tracing many of their errors, and much of their wretchedness to the superstition which prevailed, and that narrow policy that forbade their enquiring after truth, and shutting the book of knowledge from their eyes, taught them, that obedience to the laws was the only science necessary for the common herd.

“Full

“ Full of these ideas, I composed a fiction, in which, after speaking my opinions freely on existing governments, and detecting some of the enormities practised under the shew of religion, I endeavoured to picture a more perfect state ; where each individual, acting for the good of the whole, found his happiness blended with that of society, and losing those selfish feelings, which sickens at another’s prosperity, were blest in a reciprocal communication of good.

“ Delighted with my performance, I read it exultingly to my friends ; but instead of the warm praises I expected, the converts to my sentiments, I fancied the perusal of my book would make, I received only cold comments ; my opinions were treated as visionary and romantic. My bookseller refused to publish the work ; and as it was soon known I had offered such a production to the press, I was threatened by the clergy with a prosecution, and by the minister with imprisonment, should I attempt again to publish such  
heretical

heretical opinions. As I had no doubt but they would execute their threats, and was unwilling to contend with a power that could crush me, I suppressed my book. But deeply impressed with my subject, I could neither write nor think on any other.

“ Conscious of the rectitude of my intentions, I thought my sentiments deserved a candid examination, without endangering my personal safety—it was by that alone they could meet refutation, or confer benefit; if they were found, on a closer investigation, to be good, it was unjust to ~~refuse to listen to~~ opinions, merely because they were novel, and from the dread of innovation. Yet so bigoted were all those with whom I conversed on the subject, to established forms—so prejudiced in favour of ancient authority, that they not only refused to listen to my apologies, but I even lost the friendship of many.

“ Disgusted with this illiberal treatment, I thought of returning to England. My paternal

ternalestate had been hitherto unclaimed; yet as the banished Momarch had long been restored, I had some chance of recovering my possessions; besides, I expected to enjoy more freedom in my native land, and I began to arrange my affairs, and prepare for my departure."

The narrative of De Valcourt was again interrupted by the arrival of Duncan, whom he had left in the morning to follow at his leisure. Lady Mountshannon received him as the faithful friend of his master; while Matilda gazed on him with delight, as the preserver of De Valcourt.

Dinner was now brought in, when Duncan was placed as a guest at table; where his heart overflowing with joy, would frequently break forth in praises of his master, though restrained by his repressive frown, and awed by the presence of his noble hostess.



## CHAP. V.

Fond love, the gentle vow, the gay desire,  
The kind deceit, the still reviving fire,  
Persuasive speech, and more persuasive sighs ;  
Silence that spoke, and eloquence of eyes.

POPE.

**A**S soon as the cloth was withdrawn, De Valcourt resuming his narrative, the party were once more lost in silent attention.

“ Having no intricate affairs to settle,” continued he, “ my arrangements were soon made, and my little stock of wealth, amounting to somewhat more than a hundred pounds, collected ; but I could not quit a city in which I had experienced so many changes of fortune, without making one more effort to see the man to whom I owed so much. Trembling with emotion, I went  
to

to the house of Beaumont, where I was informed he had set off some weeks before, on a tour through Holland, to visit some distant branches of his family. I returned disappointed, and was the next day surprised by a letter from him, wherein he expressed his sorrow for having so long kept me at a distance. He had taken, he said, my character from report, and despising me for my vices, resolved to avoid all future connection with me ; but having been lately undeceived by one, who had for some time observed my conduct ; he entreated my forgiveness in a stile of humility which wounded my heart ; concluding with his earnest wishes to renew our correspondence.

“ Acquainted now with his route, and anxious to be restored to the confidence of such a man, I resolved to follow him, and we immediately set out ; but unfortunately missing him at every stage, I had the mortification of hearing at Amsterdam he had returned to France ; and was obliged, my finances running

ning low, to rest satisfied with writing; a vessel from that port, bound for Scotland, being ready to sail with the first fair wind.

“ The weather was favourable, a gentle breeze wafting us swiftly along, we were soon within sight of land. My heart bounded at the thought of once more beholding the scene of my infant years; and I already anticipated the dear delight of visiting a place so strongly imprinted on my memory, which imagination had often fondly traced while immured within the walls of a prison, where in fancy, I had climbed the craggy steep and bounded over the bleak and barren cliff.

“ Toward evening we approached the shore, when a sharp breeze blowing from the land, prevented our gaining the port, and drove us back to the ocean. I stood on the deck, watching the objects I could indistinctly discern on the shore, till the shades of evening veiled them from my view; but the moon still shedding a yellow light on the distant

distant cliffs, which softened the scene, I remained lost in enthusiastic rapture, while a tear of pleasing melancholy stole down my cheek. Wholly absorbed in my own feelings, I became insensible to all around me, till the loud thunder, rolling over my head, broke my reverie.

“ The lightning darting across the darkened atmosphere—the boisterous noise of the sailors, as they observed the increasing storm—the dashing of the waves on the shore—the roaring of the wind—and the still more awful sounds, which seemed to shake the canopy of heaven, conspiring to fill my mind, already raised almost above mortality, with images so wildly great—so majestically grand, I could not quit the spot; it would have broken my present chain of thought, and have dissolved in a moment, past the power of recalling, feelings so congenial to my heart.

“ Though warned of my danger, I for some time kept my stand; till tired by their repeated



repeated alarms, I was preparing to go to the cabin, when, by a sudden motion of the vessel, I was precipitated into the sea. In vain I endeavoured to regain the ship—in vain I called for assistance—fully employed in providing for the general safety, I was wholly unregarded, perhaps unheard.

“ I endeavoured now, as well as I was able, to swim towards the shore; but, borne by the fury of the waves, I had no power to direct my course. The dread of perishing operating on my mind, gave vigour to my efforts, and I saw myself approaching the land; but my strength beginning to fail, I had given myself up for lost, when I was suddenly carried away by the waves, and dashed against a rock with such violence, I remained for some time insensible. On recovering my reason, I found the blood streaming from my forehead, and my limbs so bruised I could scarce stand; but the place where I then was being dangerous, I walked on, till, finding a cavity, I crept

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within its shelter, and resting on the earth, endeavoured, in vain, to stop the bleeding of my wounds, which was become extremely painful: My limbs, too, grew stiff, I was faint with fatigue, and my senses soon became disordered with the anguish I suffered, when I fancied I heard a human voice, and could distinguish the accents of pity.

“ I raised my head from the earth, but my strength was exhausted, and my effort sunk into a feeble groan. Rejecting what I thought a phantom created by my disturbed imagination, and falling on the ground, I was again lost to all sense of my misery. Thus did I wear out the tedious night, reviving, at one moment, to a faint recollection of my situation, and the next wholly insensible. In this state Matilda found me; she appeared to my bewildered faculties a guardian spirit; her form, her figure, seemed something more than mortal. A faint idea is still impressed on my mind of that scene,

scene, which to you is well known. You must remember, too, the repeated enquiries I made after the ship, till I heard it was safe in port ; but even then, having no intelligence of my friend Duncan, I had reason to fear we were separated for ever ; and most sincerely did I mourn his loss : He has, however, carefully preserved my property, and we are once more united."

De Valcourt was now silent ; and, unable to meet the eye of Matilda, he walked hastily to the window. Lady Mountshannon thanked him for the candour with which he had recited his history ; assured him it had increased her esteem, and had drawn the cords of friendship that before united them, still closer. Matilda looked—her feelings she found language inadequate to express. Mountford took his hand, and, with pleasure beaming on his face, entreated him to be the guide of his future life, pointing out the road to virtue, and instructing him, by his example, to shun the paths of vice.

Lady Mountshannon declined, for the present, giving the advice he desired respecting his future conduct, saying, she could not yet consent to part with so amiable a friend: They then discoursed of indifferent subjects, till their spirits became composed, and they retired more pleased than ever with each other's society; their hearts firmly united in the bonds of friendship and congeniality.

Several weeks now passed at the castle without any material occurrence: Lady Mountshannon wondered she had not heard either of her lord or the threatened steward, but unwilling to anticipate evil, she strove to banish the subject from her mind. De Valcourt, who shared her confidence, was soon acquainted with every incident of her life, which served to increase his respect and admiration. But he soon became gloomy and thoughtful; a fixed melancholy hung over his mind, and he seemed labouring to effect some purpose painful to his feelings.



feelings. A sum of money had been left at the castle for his use by an unknown hand ; but this circumstance was not likely to depress his spirits, and Matilda observed the change with anxious concern.

His narrative had made a deep impression on her mind, and her bosom was agitated with jealousy as often as imagination presented the fascinating Signora ; though detesting her unfeeling ingratitude—her cold inconstancy—and mercenary desertion of De Valcourt ; yet there were moments when she envied her power over his heart ; but these feelings were transient ; Matilda would have been humbled by the idea of raising a passion that was not fostered by esteem. Of his vices she could not think without horror ; it pained her to join his name to any thing dishonourable ; But, on his return to virtue, the manly dignity of his mind—the noble independence of his spirit—his firm adherence to principle—his ardor in the pursuit of moral excellence—the warm

H 3 feelings

feelings of his heart—the benevolence of his temper—the delicate tenderness of his attentions—his quick sensibility—so congenial to her own feelings, she delighted to dwell. His desolate situation and pecuniary embarrassments would sometimes occur to her mind, but of them she thought only with pleasure. In a few years she should possess her large property, independent of her father's controul, and then what delight should she feel in relieving him from every difficulty; wealth had no charms to her for the purposes of parade or ostentation; but to communicate happiness, to place merit in its proper station, how truly desirable! The heart of De Valcourt, she often feared, was insensible to the strong affection that pervaded her soul; he would frequently absent himself from the castle whole days together, without any one knowing where he went, and when present, he avoided her with studious care: Yet, should he be incapable of affection for her—should he even be devoted to another, that was, in Matilda's mind,

mind, no bar to his sharing her fortune, which, if it could not procure him happiness, would become useless to her.

Impressed with the idea that De Valcourt would never be interested for her, she endeavoured to form plans for his future comfort, independently of every selfish feeling, though she loved him with the most ardent passion, though his image filled her waking thoughts, and disturbed, with visionary delights, her sleeping hours; yet, it seemed to her pure mind the love of virtue and wisdom personified, and she fondly fancied, while he was happy she could not be wretched; that she could even yield him to another to increase his felicity, contenting herself with the contemplation of his virtues, so dear to her heart. But unequal to the task, her spirits sunk—her health declined—she shunned even the society of her mother, and her only consolation was to weep in some retired spot, the sorrows of her heart. Yet, hope would often flatter  
H 4 with,

with, and reason itself confirm, the pleasing thought, that De Valcourt's bosom owned congenial feelings, and his heart beat with passion even more ardent than her own, when she observed the fond, attentive gaze of mute admiration, with which his eye sometimes fixed on her face—the pleasure that animated his features when she approached—the deep sigh that would involuntarily burst from his heart as he sat musing by her side, with all the nameless attentions of an impassioned heart, shrinking from observation, that are too minute, too delicate to attract vulgar notice, yet too expressive, too tender to escape the eye of love.

Matilda would frequently walk over the stupendous hills which spread westward from the castle, where, attracted by the wild and varied beauty of the scenery, she knew De Valcourt delighted to meditate; here her eye constantly wandered to meet him, but in vain; he either shunned those favourite haunts, or if by chance they met, he



he hurried by, as if fearful to trust himself in her presence, till wearied with expectation, her heart sickened at the incessant disappointment. Sometimes she thought his conduct the result of delicacy, and it increased her affection; at others, she would blame the fastidious pride which, to gratify a haughty prejudice, could deprive himself and her of the ineffable delights that spring from the interchange of virtuous affection. Ah! thought she, where hearts are united, how mean appears the wealth of worlds, the pomp of princes! De Valcourt cannot love me, or he would not shrink from the fancied superiority conferred by the adventitious gifts of fortune.

Thus cherishing gloomy ideas, did she chill every rising hope, and repress the growing faculties of her mind; her studies were neglected—she had lost that confidence in her own powers, which once gave energy to her exertions: Her mind, occupied with its painful feelings, could no longer be at-

tracted by external objects ; in vain did she displace book after book from the shelves of the library ; they could not, for one moment, chase away the deep sense of anguish which filled her bosom.

Amongst the books, which, in her efforts to find amusement, she had opened, was a small volume in French, containing the loves of Abelard and Eloisa ; a book that had been hitherto unregarded, and which Lady Mountshannon knew not her library contained. The glowing language of the letters attracted her attention ; the impassioned fervour of Eloisa—the heroic ardor of her mind—the misfortunes which blasted her early hopes, and condemned her in the bloom of youth to the gloom of a convent, were subjects too congenial to the present feelings of Matilda not to interest her, and the book soon became the companion of her solitary rambles.

Impressed

Impressed with ideas of monastic gloom, which the perusal of Eloisa's descriptions had fastened on her mind, she one night retired to rest, but her slumbers were disturbed, and in her visions, she fancied herself shut within one of those silent dwellings, where her father, holding over her head his sword, and threatening immediate destruction, compelled her to pronounce the solemn vow which shut her for ever from the converse of mankind; and then, by one of those quick transitions which mark these illusions of fancy, she heard De Valcourt lament her fate, and saw his shadow flit before her sight, as she pensively paced the silent, solitary ailes; when, eager to follow the well known form, she rushed forward, but just as she reached him, and stretched forth her hand to grasp his flowing garment, the ground opened, and he sunk into the abyss beneath, from whence streams of living flame seemed to issue, which rolling along the pavement, she was soon enveloped in the general conflagration: Her efforts to

escape, rousing her from this feverish sleep, she arose; and willing to shake off the impressions of terror which still hung on her spirits, strolled slowly round the castle to inhale the exhilarating breezes from the sea.

Though it was now near the middle of November, the morning was fine; the sun had risen and spangled with its beams the dew-topt ivy that hung round the walls of the castle, and was fantastically interwoven amidst the shattered turrets; the birds, too, were carolling to the early day in sounds of varied harmony. Pleased with the scene, which soothed, while it awakened sensibility, Matilda seated herself in a rude alcove, which, commanding an extensive view of the ocean, she had once delighted to deck with shells from the beach, and round which some evergreens, of her own planting, luxuriantly hung; when, taking the book from her pocket, she turned to some passages where Eloisa painted her woes with the soul-harrowing



harrowing energy of genius : Her heart was affected, and her own sorrows mingling with those well drawn images of despair ; she shut the page, and melting into tears, gave audible vent to her feelings.

“ Happy Eloisa,” said she, “ thou wast beloved ! and the consciousness of that could soothe thee through a long life of monastic seclusion, sweeten every sacrifice, and cheer thy lonely hours ; but hapless Matilda, avoided by the man she loves, doomed, perhaps, ere many weeks are past, to lose forever his society, to yield him to some more favoured rival, has no solace. Yet,” cried she, with a sigh, “ may my De Valcourt be happy, and never know the sorrows he has inflicted !” when, raising her eyes, she beheld him at her feet.

He had listened with astonishment to her last words, and unable longer to suppress his feelings, obey the dictates of prudence, or listen to the voice of honour, which had so long

long compelled him to painful silence, he attempted to express his feelings, while he gazed on her face with rapturous delight; but a crowd of tumultuous sensations immediately rushing to his heart, and shivering through his frame, he remained more eloquently mute. To be loved by Matilda, poor, friendless, and deserted as he was, was pleasure too great for utterance. He seized her passive, trembling hand, and pressing it to his lips, while the energies of his soul beamed on his countenance, and animated his features,

“ Ah! happy hour, and happy day;” cried he, “ I had marked it as one to be remembered for life, ere I knew the blessings it would bestow!” A faint sickness now seized Matilda, while pale and disordered, she sat almost overpowered with the mixed sensations of pleasure, surprise, fear, and regret, which at once assailed her. To know that De Valcourt loved, was indeed, happiness; but then, her secret had been discovered,

discovered, and his present conduct might be the result of compassion: She shrunk from the thought—her senses were confused—she hid her face from his ardent gaze, and would have withdrawn the hand he still held: But De Valcourt alarmed, pressed it closer to his bosom, while he cried, “Dearest Matilda, forgive my intrusion, and do not, ah! do not so soon repent the happiness you have conferred. Did you but know the pain it has cost me to restrain the ardor of my passion—the anguish I have suffered, while I condemned myself to eternal separation, you would pity me, and no longer torture the man who loves you, beyond what he has power to express, with this cruel suspense. Matilda, dearest Matilda, turn on me, once more a look of tender forgiveness.”

The earnestness with which he uttered these words soothed her wounded pride; she raised her head, and beholding, in his expressive face, all the emotions that agitated his

his heart, could no longer doubt his love, or conceal her own feelings; but, sinking in his arms, and hiding her blushes in his bosom, he pressed her to his heart, fondly gazing on the form he supported. At length recovering some degree of composure, she leaned on his arm, and as they slowly proceeded towards the castle, De Valcourt said, “ Matilda, I have loved you almost from the first moment we met, with a passion the most ardent; my affection, founded on esteem, has taken deep root in my mind, and was, I have long felt, unconquerable. Yet, poor and destitute as I was, how could I address you, knowing, as I did, the wealth to which you were heiress. It seemed hardly probable but that even you, generous as you are, would attribute my affection, at least to a mixture of convenience; and so pure, so far from every selfish feeling, much less the mean consideration of pecuniary circumstances was my love, that I could not endure that my conduct should give rise to such a suspicion. The thought

was



was too oppressive ; I resolved to subdue this unpropitious love, and quit the castle for ever ; quit it ere I had violated the laws of hospitality—ere I had practised on the confidence of your noble mother—ere my tongue had dared to utter that I loved—ere I had made an effort to impose a beggar on your affections. Though the thought of separation filled me with despair, yet my resolution was fixed ; and I determined to obey the laws of honour. Impressed with this sentiment, and fearful lest in an unguarded moment my heart might be tempted to betray its bursting feelings, I shunned your dangerous society, and waited only the completion of a scheme with which I have pleased my fond imagination, to bid you an eternal farewell. This day my work is finished, and I meant to dedicate the idol of my fancy to you ; to devote the day to happiness, and to-morrow steal silently from the castle, as I wanted courage to say adieu ! Fool that I was, to suppose I could revel in delight in the prospect of seeing you no more :

more : No, when the hour came, my heart sunk from the trial ; I have passed a sleepless night, and would have protracted the day that I might yet have some excuse for remaining here, though but to look on you, to hear sometimes the music of your voice ; and this day, so long thought of by me with pleasure, rose with uncommon gloom. I watched the rising sun, as it seemed to gladden every heart but mine ; I looked earnestly on the vale below ; on the long winding walks where I had so often listened to you. Ah ! thought I, how deeply will every vestige of this spot be imprinted on my mind ! here will my enamoured heart dwell, though I drag this body far, far hence. At that moment I saw you cross the lawn, when, unable longer to support the feelings that oppressed me, surely, I cried, the stern principles of honour are now fulfilled ; the demands of justice answered ; to-morrow I shall tear myself from all my heart holds dear ; from every hope of earthly happiness ! What then shall forbid

bid my following Matilda? soothing my sorrows, for the last time, with her conversation, that I may remember to alleviate my misery in banishment, with the charms of this last interview?"

They had by this time reached the hall; the family were not yet assembled, and Matilda quitting De Valcourt, hurried to her chamber, and by tears relieved her heart: Her sensations were those of delight; all her hopes, her wishes, were now accomplished; yet, her mind was oppressed with sadness, she knew not why, and her joy seemed nearly allied to sorrow. Her feelings became at length more calm, and she descended, with tolerable composure, to the breakfast-parlour: But De Valcourt was less successful in composing the agitation of his mind—tumultuous delight pervaded his senses, and trembled through every nerve—he found excess of joy more uncontrollable than even the despair that had preceded it: Yet his rapture was not without alloy; he

he had deviated from his own ideas of propriety—had fallen into the very error he wished to avoid, and had taken such pains to shun. How could he now appear before Lady Mountshannon—how support her unaltered friendship, or maintain his character for candour and sincerity, were thoughts that obtruded to repress his rapture.

“ Yet,” cried he, recurring again to the bright side of the picture, “ what mighty evil have I done in faintly uttering the feelings of my heart, in telling Matilda that I love ; it is not her wealth for which I sigh ; no, that may be independently her own ; I would not owe my support to her fortune. What are titles—what are riches ? my heart is devoted to her ; it will be the study of my life to render her happy. Lady Mountshannon is above the narrow maxims of the world ; she dares boldly differ from its rules, and will not set a higher value on wealth than it merits. I will acquaint her with my  
conduct ;



conduct ; I will have no concealment ; she will, she must approve my love."

Pleased with arguments so favourable to his wishes, and animated by hope, his spirits were ungovernable ; he played a thousand antic tricks during breakfast ; pushed the food from his lips with disdain ; and, in short, appeared almost frantic with delight. Joy is quickly communicated ; the sudden change in De Valcourt—the happiness he seemed to enjoy, animated the whole party. Matilda, though at first embarrassed, soon partook of the general cheerfulness.

" We will devote this day to pleasure," said De Valcourt, pressing the hands of Lady Mountshannon, as she rose from the breakfast-table, " it is dedicated to Matilda ; an offering of gratitude waits her approval ; come, prepare to follow me."

They were soon ready ; Matilda lightly bounded along, filled with eager expectation ;

ation; the air was still; the sun shone on the undulating waves of the ocean. They ascended the high cliff that overhung the beach, and, pleased with the extending prospect, pursued their way.

With Matilda's arm fast locked within his, De Valcourt approached Lady Mountshannon, when, taking her hand, and joining it with Matilda's, "Happy mother, and still more happy daughter, how worthy of each other!" cried he, as he led them to a sequestered spot, shaded from observation by trees, and sheltered from the near approach of the unfeeling traveller, by some neat railing newly placed round it. They entered, and beheld a small monument, on the top of which was engraved these words, "Sacred to the guardian spirit of this rock, to gratitude, and Matilda:" At the bottom the sculptor's art had been employed to form a rocky cavern, in which was a female figure, bending, with fixed attention, over the form of a man apparently lifeless.

lifeless. The touches of the artist were exquisite; the figures, though small, were animated, and you might fancy you could trace the feelings of that moment in the lifeless stone. Their high wrought sensations of joy were quickly changed to a melancholy still more enchanting; their hearts beat with soft emotion; it was a moment of delight so great, so far beyond expression, that even memory failed to give a full sense of the fleeting bliss.

De Valcourt bent his knee to the ground, when, ardently pressing Matilda's hand, "Great God," he cried, "in this solemn moment, when my soul soars with more than mortal energy to Thee, deign to listen to my supplication: Pour down on her head the choicest of thy gifts; guard her from the paths of error—shield her from danger; and oh! if misery must be the lot of either, let it fall on me alone; make her but happy, and I will praise thy mercy."

"Bless

"Bless you, my children," cried Lady Mountshannon emphatically, as she raised a hand of each to her lips, while a tear of pleasure started to her eye.

"We need refreshment," said De Valcourt, rising, "and will leave this sacred spot to partake a rustic repast I have already prepared. But say, does my Matilda approve this rude effort of her De Valcourt's gratitude? Will she sometimes visit it to meditate on him?"

"Ah! do not ask me to tell you" returned she, "what I feel! my heart is full, and expression comes so far short of what I would say."

He then led them, by a gentle descent on the side of the cliff, to the cavern where he had once been in danger of perishing, but where he had now spread, on a large stone, in rustic order, a variety of cakes, cream, fruit, jellies, and wines of various sorts; while, in a distant opening, was placed a band of music, which, echoing along the vaulted



vaulted roof, mellowed by distance, reached the ear, and seemed the effect of enchantment. To heighten the scene, eight of the village girls, dressed in white, attended round the board: The cavern had been warmed by a large wood fire, which, after burning some hours, had been extinguished before the guests arrived. Mary and her children were there to receive them, and the surgeon, with whom De Valcourt had formed a growing friendship, acted as master of the feast.

Delighted with this fairy scene, it was late in the day before they thought of returning, nor would they then have been willing to quit the spot, had not the rise of waters warned them to be gone.

De Valcourt longed for an opportunity to communicate to Lady Mountshannon the adventure of the morning, to ease his mind from the weight of concealment under which it now laboured. Matilda, too, wished her

mother to be acquainted with all her feelings—with her every action, but wanted courage to begin the subject, though she hated secrecy, and felt uneasy while conscious of having a thought concealed from so indulgent a friend.

Returning home, De Valcourt said, "After I had received the money so strangely conveyed to me, which I hardly yet felt at liberty to use, as I was one day walking on the cliff, meditating on my escape, and recalling to memory the awful moment, the thought struck me that I would with it consecrate some spot to gratitude, and perpetuate the event. Full of this idea, I arranged my plan, sent for an artist from London, and resolving to surprise you, concealed my design. In my solitary rambles I superintended my work, while our good friend the surgeon lent me his assistance. This romantic employment soothed my mind, and supported my spirits under the struggle I felt while forming a resolution to obey the stern dictates

tates of honour, and quit for ever all I held dear. Often did I think, with delight, that you, Matilda, that you, madam, would visit the spot, and talk of De Valcourt, when kingdoms, perhaps, would divide us. But my virtuous resolutions are fled; I have transgressed the bounds I prescribed myself, and must rely on your mercy," bowing to Lady Mountshannon. "Virtuous, did I call my resolutions; no, surely they deserve not that name; they were raised by pride; I worshipped an idol of my own creating, and should, perhaps, have sacrificed at its shrine all my earthly felicity."

Surprised by this conversation, Lady Mountshannon gave De Valcourt an early opportunity of entering on the subject; it was her first wish to see Matilda united to a man of worth and talents. Convinced by experience, of the misery of a cold, lifeless union; and, above every pecuniary consideration, she had seen, with pleasure, her growing passion for De Valcourt; but con-

scious that man, from the free habits in which he indulged, was prone to change, and by yielding to every gust of passion, rendered capricious, she hoped to have been more fully satisfied of the stability of De Valcourt's affection, before Matilda was made acquainted with his feelings, knowing the extreme sensibility of her heart, and dreading the effects of early disappointment. She heard, therefore, with some regret, that reciprocal explanations had passed between them, but it was now too late to recede, and she frankly told De Valcourt her sentiments.

"Believe me," said she, "there is not an individual of whom I think so highly as yourself; yet, such is the nature of man, I know it is not always in the power even of genius and virtue like Matilda's, to fix his roving heart. You will, therefore, do well to leave us for some time, and try the effect of absence on your heart; that should you find, in the metropolis of England, a woman

more



more suited to your taste, or feel in yourself a disinclination when surrounded with more polished society for the simple fondness of my child, you may boldly avow it before the indissoluble union is sealed, and save yourself and her from future wretchedness: For though the struggle to banish you from her mind will, for a time, chill her expanding faculties, and cloud her youth with sorrow, yet it will be more supportable than a life of perpetual warfare, and her peace may again be restored. Besides," added she, "I would have you try every method consistent with your principles, to regain possession of your estate, and have your title acknowledged; not to gratify any wish of mine, for I consider titles as gewgaws, that strike the multitude with wonder, but are useless to the possessor; 'tis only to obviate any objection Lord Mountshannon may make to his daughter's marriage with you, who will probably interfere, or at least retard our purpose."

Half angered by her suspicions, De Valcourt gave a reluctant consent, though he would not allow the necessity of proving his affection by absence. "It was no common passion," he said, "but founded on esteem, and a thorough knowledge of the congeniality of their minds;" yet he professed his wish to gain for himself some honourable establishment; and, much as he disliked to cringe at court, and sue for his rights; much as he had reason to dread the uncertainty of law, yet, so great was the prize in view, that he could submit to the drudgeries of the one, or the anxieties of the other, to obtain it, and had no objection to visit London, but the primary motive which induced her ladyship to wish it.

"We will not talk of that any more, then," returned she, "nor would I advise you to apply to the law for redress. Sir Charles Ormond will present you to the King, make your story known; if he puts you in possession of your rights it is well;

it

if not, Matilda's fortune is more than sufficient for private life, and, if I know your heart, it will not cost you a sigh to give up the parade of wealth."

Matilda, who, from the moment De Valcourt obtained a knowledge of her sentiments, had dreaded the scrutinizing eye of her mother, and for the first time in her life, felt oppressed in her presence, was greatly agitated, when Lady Mountshannon calling her into her dressing room, began to discourse with more than usual solemnity in her manner. She did not at first mention De Valcourt; yet, Matilda trembled—a crimson blush overspread her face at every sentence which bore any allusion to him. After conversing some time, when her mother saw the emotions of her mind began to subside, she led immediately to the subject.

Matilda was soothed by the approbation of her mother; she sunk on her bosom, while a grateful tear dropped on the hand

she held in her's; but she listened with painful attention to the possibility of De Valcourt's inconstancy: Judging from her own feelings, she could not credit the idea; yet she knew the opinions of her mother were formed from deep reflection, and long experience, and had ever found her's the voice of truth; and, alas! should her fears now be prophetic, how wretched must she be! yet, to repress the feelings that now warmed her heart was hardly possible; besides, it would be parting with a real good, only to avoid a dreaded evil. Lady Mountshannon left her at liberty to act for herself; contented with warning her of danger, she submitted the rest to her own judgment; and Matilda resolved, while she cherished a passion which gave new vigour to her life, that had rolled on unheeded before, she would endeavour to acquire a constancy of mind that might enable her to support every ill, even the loss of De Valcourt's affection, with firmness.

Having



Having now no reason to avoid each other, De Valcourt and Matilda hailed the morning breeze together; together climbed the mountain's side, and beheld the rude approach of winter, in fields devoid of verdure, and trees disrobed of their foliage. But their hearts, formed for the love of nature, could look with equal delight on its productions, when with loud and boisterous roar the north wind shook the forest oak—dashed the high and foaming waves on the shore, or, with piercing frost, spread death and desolation over the vegetable world—as when the sun of spring, reanimating creation, clothed it in brightest green, and roused to harmony and love the animal world, as when the gentle breeze of summer scarce rustled through the trees, or yellow autumn spread smiling plenty through the land.

Thus lost in the soft enchantment of love, their days passed sweetly; but awake only to feeling, to the delights of passion, they

passed unmarked by improvement, undistinguished by benevolence; wholly occupied with each other, the pains and pleasures of mankind were equally disregarded.

Lady Mountshannon observed them, with regret, sinking into indolent delight; and again urging De Valcourt to be gone, he set out to visit the scenes of his infant years, previous to his departure for London. Mountford, who was allowed to accompany him, and who had never yet been beyond the paternal roof, rejoiced in this opportunity of seeing the romantic country of Scotland, through which they must pass to the Highlands.

When De Valcourt quitted the castle, Matilda, silent and sad, paced his loved walks—ranged his apartments—took up his favourite authors—read the passages he had so often recited with such feeling pathos, or quoted with effect, or sat musing on the scene where his eye had so lately marked  
the

the setting sun, and beheld its earliest beauties, while she recalled to her fond imagination his words, his looks, and imprinted more deeply on her heart, his sentiments and virtues.

Lady Mountshannon saw, with pain, the state of her mind; but while she respected her feelings too much, and knew the human heart too well to attempt to draw off her attention by common observations or familiar objects, she wished to divert her from the fascinating object of her reverie—to see her mind once more roused to active usefulness. To effect this purpose, she sent for the children of Mary; they had once strongly interested Matilda's heart, and she hoped much from their artless prattle.

Pleased to be again in her presence, they ran eagerly to her, climbing her knee, and clinging round her neck, innocently regretted her long absence from them; said their lessons had been learned, forgotten, and

learned again; but their dear governess had taught them no new ones; their play-things, too, were broken, but nobody now would give them any others. Their simple complaint affected her; she remembered, with regret, that wholly engrossed by pleasure, she had neglected those duties that once so pleasingly occupied her; blushed at her selfishness, and determined to be no longer the slave of feeling: Then, turning to Lady Mountshannon, "From what a dream of folly," said she, "have these children awakened me; but believe me, dearest mother, my future hours shall be devoted to improvement."

Animated by her struggles to subdue feeling, Matilda pursued her long neglected employments, and resumed her usual studies with avidity; and though a thought of De Valcourt would frequently intrude—break the chain of her ideas, and arrest attention; yet her plan was followed with steady vigour, and her mind acquired new fortitude.

Encouraged



Encouraged by the praises of her mother, and impressed by the desire of becoming more worthy of her De Valcourt, her faculties daily gained strength—her powers of reflection became stronger, and her judgment more accurate: Though diligent to improve the time of his absence, she always dedicated part of each day to visit the sacred monument, to think of its founder, and count the tedious hours that must yet elapse before she could receive intelligence; nor could the snows of December, which already began to cover the ground, the keen wind or drizzling rain, retard her purpose.

The happy morning at last arrived; three letters were delivered at the castle, one from Lord Mountshannon, one from Mountford to his mother, and one from De Valcourt to Matilda, who, trembling with expectation, hastily broke the seal, and read the following tender effusion.

## CHAP. VI.

Good Lord ! what can this giddy rout excite ;  
 Why on each other with fell tooth to fall,  
 A neighbour's fortune, fame, or peace to blight,  
 Or make new tiresome parties for the coming night ?

THOMSON.

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“**M**ATILDA, I have beheld the spot  
 where thy De Valcourt first drew breath—  
 where he has sported many a long summer's  
 day—where the earliest impressions of his  
 mind were formed ; have seen it while thy  
 spirit seeming to hover over me, rendered  
 every feeling sacred ; have stood on the bar-  
 ren mountain's top, where imagination paint-  
 ed thee hanging fondly on my arm, listening  
 to my tale of infant pleasure ; have in fancy,  
 fondly clasped thee to my aching bosom, as  
 the thrilling tear started to my eye, till the  
 delusion vanishing, I have remembered with  
 anguish,

anguish, the distance that now parts us—the lengthened separation to ensue; then as the dread of losing thee for ever rushed on my mind, my heart sickened—and as the prospect blackened, my feverish brain grew dizzy with the tumult of my mind. I have tottered on the brink of madness. Ah! my Matilda, wilt thou not sooth me with one consolatory line—one kind assurance of thy love, to calm the throbbings of my anxious bosom. I have trod over the earth, where perhaps, a father's bones are yet mouldering—where a mother breathed her last expiring sigh; but memory flies those scenes of horror to dwell on softer feelings. You have wept over the woes of my house, and my heart is soothed by the recollection.

“A modern mansion has been built on the scite of our old castle; my feelings revolt at the sight—I almost hate the being who could thus mock its gothic grandeur; but I cannot learn to whom the estate now belongs; the steward alone is known to the rustic

rustic inhabitants ; but it is enough for me to know it is transferred to another.

“ I shall soon return to spend a few fleeting hours of bliss with thee—to listen once more to thy converse, ere I quit thee for many long, long months. Ah! is my Matilda now well? is she happy? I wait the return of my messenger with anxious expectation. Farewell! Remember you live in the heart, and animate the mind of your

“ DE VALCOURT.”

Matilda gazed on the well-known characters, while a tear bedewed the paper, and a melancholy so soft and soothing pervaded her senses, that she would not have checked the rising sigh, or have suppressed the falling tear to which it gave birth, for all the joys the world could offer. She took her pen and attempted to sketch the feelings of her heart ; but the soft ideas vanished ere they could be traced ; all expression seemed too poor to paint the ardent sentiment which  
glowed



glowed in her bosom. Several sheets were written and destroyed; some she thought too cold—others, though they expressed her love, were devoid of the energy that elevated her mind, till wearied with repeated efforts, she concluded this artless epistle:

“I have pressed the senseless paper to my lips, while tears of rapture weakened the characters that spoke the heart of my De Valcourt. Could I convey to thee all the weakness I feel, I should blush as thy eye dwelt on my tenderness! Yet why blush; is not our's a union of mind—am I not ennobled by my love? I have in fancy, followed thee in thy long and perilous journey; have seen thee climb the steep and rugged mountain, the keen wind blowing roughly in thy face; have seen thee, with firm and undaunted steps, pursue thy way unappalled by the dread of lawless banditti, or lurking villain. De Valcourt, I have daily visited the little spot dedicated by thee to love; have gazed on the watery expanse, while my heart

heart poured forth silent oraisons for thee. I feel affection for every thing that surrounds it—every blade of grass is interesting to my feelings: Bred in solitude, I have nourished sensibility. With few objects to engage my attention, my affections have ever been warm and animated: undissipated by variety—unchecked by disappointment, they have grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength. You have taught me the delights of love—have awakened a new source of rapture in my bosom; the sentiment has taken deep root in my heart, and the traces will remain to the latest hour of existence. Did I possess the cunning of the world I should deny this tenderness; should torment thy bosom with vain fears, and withhold this confession; but I disdain such narrow prudence; what my heart feels, my tongue shall avow: Yet, I tremble for thy conduct, and dread lest our separation should prove eternal! De Valcourt, thou canst not love like me; in thy commerce with the world, the fine sensations of the heart,

which

which give strength to my feelings, have been rudely torn away. Thou art going again to enter on a scene of folly; surrounded by the dazzling beauties of a court, thou mayest forget the simple, rustic Matilda; perhaps, too, thou mayest sacrifice thy principles, and be again the victim of headstrong passion. Heaven avert these fears, and shield me from the dreaded evil; I could not assimilate with vice—could not love a degraded being.

“ The winter amusements have commenced at the castle: While the bag-pipe plays in the hall, the light-hearted maidens of the village dance down the last hours of day. Impressed with thy image, I fly from the scene; 'tis to me now all noise and folly, when forgetting the chills of winter I steal to thy favourite walk beneath the western battlements. The nightingale has ceased her plaintive lay, to find some rude shelter from the cold, while all nature seems to share the melancholy of my heart: yet, I  
remember

remember when she made vocal the grove, and in fancy, still hear her voice—still listen to the sentiments that once flowed from my De Valcourt's tongue. Yet, think not my hours have passed indolently in thy absence; no, I have been aspiring after excellence to render me more worthy thy esteem; with my pencil, too, I have been diligent, and have sketched thee whilst kneeling at thy little altar, with the delighted group around thee; the likeness is good, and I only wait thy approval to finish the picture. Benevolence, too, occupies my mind; my pupils again receive instruction; I will not be selfish, or the slave of passion. Adieu! may angels guard thy way, and return thee in safety to thy own

MATILDA."

Before Matilda had folded her paper, Lady Mountshannon, who had some time finished her letter to Mountford, tapped gently at her door, and inquired if she would not write a few lines to her brother.

“ With



“ With pleasure,” she cried; and taking his affectionate epistle, read its interesting contents. He spoke of De Valcourt—of their journey—the difficulties they had encountered from unfrequented roads, and the severity of the season—praising the courage and fortitude of his companion. Delighted with his intelligence, Matilda hastily finished a letter to her beloved Mountford, and the messenger was dispatched with strict charge to make all possible haste, though, with the utmost expedition, he would not reach them till they had proceeded nearly half way on their journey homeward.

At leisure now to consider less interesting subjects, Lady Mountshannon broke the seal of her husband’s letter, and, to her astonishment, found it couched in terms the most affectionate. He spoke with deep contrition of his vices—regretted his long estrangement from his family—did justice to her virtues—entreated her pardon for the past, especially his last threat to send one to  
superintend

superintend his concerns ; assuring her it was only a momentary ebullition of anger, caused by painful disappointment, but without a serious thought of putting it into execution: Concluding with telling her, he meant to spend part of the Christmas at the castle with a few chosen friends, if she could once more consent to receive the father of her children—her unworthy husband.

Lady Mountshannon now regretted she had not read the contents sooner, that she might have communicated to her son intelligence so flattering to her wishes ; yet, she almost feared to credit his professions, and dreaded lest they should be dictated by art to effect some new scheme he had in view, which might be more dangerous to her children's happiness than even his open violence.

But Matilda, whose mind was now rendered susceptible of every joyful impression, and whose spirits were too much elevated to

look

look on any but the bright side of the picture, endeavoured to dissipate her fears : She could not believe the human heart so corrupt, so full of deceit, as to be able at will to assume the semblance of virtue, only to effect purposes of evil. Her mother hoped it would not ; but unable wholly to divest herself of dread, she sat down to answer her husband's request, and soon produced the following reply :

“ My LORD,

“ You will not wonder, if, after so many years of neglect, I should feel at a loss how to address you, or acknowledge that my affections towards you, as a wife, are repressed—chilled—annihilated : Yet, I rejoice in your present resolution, and shall witness your return to virtue with the most heart-felt satisfaction ; it will be a consolation soothing to the last years of my existence. I will therefore prepare every accomodation for yourself and friends my retired situation will permit ; but as the castle must undergo some repairs,

repairs, I fear it will not be ready quite so soon as you expect. I will, however, use all possible expedition, and shall joyfully wait your arrival, when I shall receive you as your friend, your sister; but you must forgive me when I say, that every principle of delicacy forbids my considering you as a husband, under my present feelings. Your children, I hope, will awaken your affection; they are amiable and interesting, and long ardently to behold the author of their being. Farewell.

MATILDA MOUNTSHANNON."

Matilda, who believed all the evils she had hitherto dreaded from her father were now passed; that his virtuous resolutions would be strengthened by his intended visit; and that affection, kindled by the sight of his offspring, and long neglected wife, would bind him to virtue, and create in him a love of domestic enjoyment, waited the arrival of De Valcourt with increased impatience, to communicate this delightful intelligence.

At



At length, to gratify her wishes, they arrived, and entered the court, their panting coursfers breathless with speed. Trembling and agitated, she flew to the gate, and was instantly folded in the arms of De Valcourt. The meeting was tender, though that Matilda should doubt the constancy of his affections, somewhat checked his transports.

They now spent a few days of happiness, interrupted only by the dread of impending separation ; the short absence they had suffered, gave strength to their feelings, and, blessed with each other's society, they had no wish beyond this delightful solitude ; the world, with all its allurements, had no charms for them.

Lady Mountshannon, who was already busied in preparing, and who knew not how soon his lordship might arrive, urged the departure of De Valcourt, as she wished not at present to introduce him. Much as

she hated disguise, she feared to expose Matilda to danger; and she wanted to develop her husband's designs before she placed too great confidence in him—confidence she might afterwards severely repent. Besides, when in London, De Valcourt might gain from Sir Charles, and other of his associates, intelligence that would direct her judgment.

Yielding at length to her desires, he set out for the metropolis. Though he had little doubt of the sincerity of Lord Mountshannon's reformation, it had ever been a favourite sentiment of his, that the heart of man was not naturally corrupt; that he seldom remained for ever under the trammels of vice; yet he knew old habits were difficult to conquer; but his lordship's present conduct, flattering both his inclinations and opinions, he was willing to believe him sincere.

Some

Some time passed in making the necessary arrangements to receive into the castle the numerous guests, and their attendants, it was expected his lordship would bring; for he had written again to say his journey would be postponed some time longer, when a hunting party would accompany him.—Matilda, who anticipated the pleasure of seeing her father—of contemplating his change of manners—beholding the first effusions of paternal affection warming his heart, and diffusing itself over his countenance, wondered he should like to have so many witnesses of his feelings. Yet, she was aware, that a man who had spent his life in a crowd, might shrink from solitude, and to this she attributed his conduct.

De Valcourt had now been gone near three weeks, and no intelligence having yet arrived, Matilda's spirits were agitated; one moment she trembled for his personal safety, and the next sunk under the humiliating idea

of his inconstancy. Lady Mountshannon vainly endeavoured to account for his silence, and as vainly endeavoured to calm her daughter's fears; to Sir Charles Ormond she had written a letter of enquiries, but that, too, remained unanswered.

One night, while they were talking over the events of the last four months which had crowded so rapidly they could scarce be said to succeed each other, and which had given variety to their lives, that for years had rolled on in the same unvaried tenor, they heard the trampling of horses approaching the castle; the bell was rang violently, and the servants were soon in motion. Though prepared for the interview, and in hourly expectation of her lord's arrival, Lady Mountshannon felt herself unequal to the task of receiving him; she attempted to rise, but her limbs trembled—her head became giddy: she sunk again in her chair, and resting on the bosom of Matilda, could only desire her son to hasten to his father, saying



saying she and his sister would follow as soon as she was able. Mountford, somewhat abashed, and more agitated, reached the court just as part of the company alighted; but as he had no means of discovering his father from the rest, he bowed respectfully, and was silently leading the way, when Sir Charles Ormond, who had, at that moment, committed his horse to the care of his servant, approached, and taking his hand, "My dear Mountford," said he, "how happy I am once again to meet you; your mother, and my Matilda, I hope, are both well;" then, turning about without waiting a reply, "allow me, my lord," he cried, "to introduce you to your son: I told you as we journeyed how hospitably I had once been received here—how worthy I found your whole family of my esteem."

Mountford advanced, and bending his knee to his father, stammered out something at which his lordship smiled, while he assured him of his paternal regard; and, bidding

him rise, examined his features with scrutinizing severity, while he presented him to his guests: The rising affections of Mountford were checked by his reception, for his lordship's air, though polite, was cold; his manners unembarrassed, no trembling emotion quivered on his tongue, or choaked his utterance; his gaiety was uninterrupted; he entered the saloon, asked why Lady Mountshannon did not appear to do the honours of her house—ordered refreshments immediately to be served, and seemed to possess that ease which his son vainly endeavoured to obtain. His heart was interested, and his awkward attempts to render himself agreeable—his embarrassed conversation, served only to entertain the company, and exercise the wit of his lordship, who sneeringly said, “The boy will do, Ormond—he has parts, I see, and only wants polish, though his manners might have been more refined, had my groom been his tutor.”

Mountford

Mountford could endure no more; this reflection, which seemed to be meant for his mother, stung him to the heart, and he retired for the night. Lady Mountshannon, still unable to appear, requested a few minutes private conversation with her husband: He entered her apartment with some agitation—a blush of shame tinged his cheek. Unfeeling as he was, he could not support the retrospect of his injustice unmoved, nor behold the altered countenance of his wife without pain: He remembered, when not fifteen years ago his vices sent into retirement the woman whose virtues he could not but revere, while the bloom of beauty glowed on her cheek, and sparkled in her eye: These feelings were, however, transient, and soon recovering his wonted composure, he threw himself at her feet, besought her forgiveness for the past, with warm professions of future amends.

Affected by the scene, and the painful recollections that rushed on her mind, she

took his hand, and, in a voice rendered almost inarticulate by emotion, said, "You know not, my lord, you cannot form an adequate idea of the delight your present conduct gives me ; for your own—for mine—for your children's sake, I rejoice : But forgive my doubts ; remember how long I have seen you devoted only to the gratification of selfish passions, wholly neglectful of your offspring ! and be not surpris'd, if I cannot immediately credit a change so extraordinary, so unexpected."

His lordship pretended at first to resent her suspicions, and by well affected anger, almost convinced her of his sincerity ; then, softening by degrees, he said, " My present virtuous resolutions were not the effect of momentary feeling, but of a long formed plan, which I made many efforts to put in execution sooner ; finding still, however, some new temptation to lead me aside, I feared to make too early an avowal of my intention, lest, falling again into old habits, I should



should be branded with the name of hypocrite. 'Tis true, I ought to have fought the infant affections of my children ; but I dreaded the reproof their artless loves might strike into my bosom ; besides, I feared the severity of your principles—nor have I been so wholly neglectful as you suppose : I constantly enquired of my children's welfare, and heard, with delight, the improvement they made in all useful learning. But where is Matilda ? I have not yet embraced her, though my heart is prepared to love her."

Almost ashamed of her fears, Lady Mountshannon pressed his lordship's hand to her lips, when, going to the door of her closet, she led in Matilda, whose feelings were all alive : She had seen her father as he entered her mother's apartment, and contrasted with the images her fancy had formerly drawn of him, his figure was strongly prepossessing, and her heart, formed for love, already began to cherish affection for the man, the thought of whom had once chilled her with

horror. She ran to her father, who, while he folded her in his arms, really gazed on her fine form with delight. Too polite to be long engrossed by the feelings of his heart, or even the affectation of those feelings, his lordship soon left them, to partake, with his guests, some more animating pleasure.

Matilda, who had heard from Mountford, of Sir Charles's arrival, waited impatiently till the company should retire, that she might enquire after De Valcourt; but they sat late, and the state of inebriety to which they were at last reduced, rendering it impossible to effect her wishes, she was obliged to wait till morning.

Soon as the party assembled, Lord Mountshannon presented to his lady Lord Ormond, father of Sir Charles, the Viscount Mandeville, together with a large group of honourable and right honourable friends, who filled a vacant chair—eat, drank, and slept; but

but who, not possessed of minds sufficiently strong to form any character, it will not be necessary to introduce.

Sir Charles, the moment he entered, flew to Matilda, and inquired, in a tone of tenderness, if she was ill; while he saw, with pity, that the rosy hue that once glowed on her cheek—the lustre that once sparkled in her eye, were fled. Answering with negligent thanks she was well, he would have proceeded to express his joy; but, eager for information on the subject nearest her heart, she anxiously asked how he left his friend De Valcourt. Starting at the name De Valcourt, he cried, “Great God, is he not here? You surprise me greatly, for I have never seen him since the day we left the castle together; and though I have often wondered I did not hear from him after his promise to write, yet I fully expected to find him with you, and should, had you not prevented me, have asked why he did not appear.”

Sickenings at the painful confirmation of her fears, she told him it was now near a month since he left them, and no intelligence had yet arrived ; that her mother had once applied to himself for information, but as the letter remained unanswered, she judged it had not reached him. Sir Charles assured her it never had ; and, after hazarding many conjectures concerning the present situation of De Valcourt, and the cause of his silence, (all of which Matilda thought improbable) he ventured to hint the possibility of his being an impostor. Fired with anger, she resented the injurious suspicion, and Sir Charles, fearing he had gone too far, entreated her forgiveness, with many assurances of his personal esteem for De Valcourt ; adding, that nothing but the respect he felt for herself, and the impossibility of otherwise accounting for his unworthy behaviour, could, he believed, have raised such an idea.

Sir Charles alone in defence of the  
Matilda



Matilda accepted his apology ; but unable to suppress the painful feelings this conversation had excited, she remained silent, wholly engrossed by the confused thoughts which arose in her mind, and regardless of the attentions of Sir Charles, or the studied compliments of the viscount. As the day proved extremely hazy, a drizzling sleet falling, the gentlemen were obliged to find amusement within the castle : Some entertained themselves in the tennis court ; others sauntered along the galleries to view the antiquated pictures, and rusty armory which decorated the walls, while the viscount and Lord Mountshannon entered the long deserted billiard-room, where, for many years, the spiders had unmolested spread their snares to entangle the unwary flies, but who had now been displaced from their abodes, to make way for the more artful ensnarer, man.

Sir Charles alone, in defiance of the weather, strolled to the village with Mountford ;  
and.

and Lady Mountshannon being busied in making some further arrangements, Matilda stole to her favourite spot, the little monument, to assuage, in solitude, her full heart; to think of De Valcourt, and weep the uncertainty of his fate.

At dinner the party was enlarged by the arrival of some ladies, with whom Lady Mountshannon had kept a distant acquaintance since her retirement, and whom she invited to share the festivity displayed at the castle. The glass now circulating freely, the characters of her guests were soon unfolded to the penetrating eye of their noble hostess. They talked of the town, the court, while all condemned the weakness of the monarch they flattered, and regretted some object raised to favour by female influence, less worthy than themselves, and on whom the thoughtless King lavished the favours for which they sighed. The conversation at length beginning to be unrestrained, soon degenerated into licentiousness, which

which custom at that time authorised, even in the most refined female society, when Lady Mountshannon, after vainly endeavouring to check their follies, quitted the room.

This was a new scene to Matilda; the few guests who had hitherto visited at the castle were wont to spend the afternoons in social converse, when some interesting subject was discussed, which either conveyed improvement to the understanding, cultivated the taste, or amused the fancy; and she saw, with pity, that man, the lordly creature man, who boasts superior powers of mind, wider extent of faculties, and claims the exclusive privilege of governing and directing all inferior animals, could find pleasure in breaking the bounds of decency, and sinking below the dignity of a rational creature.

Though tea was at that time not much known in England, it had been for some time admitted amongst the luxuries of Mountford

Mountford castle ; and the gentlemen, tired at length of each other's society, attended to partake of this expensive beverage. Though checked by the just resentment of Lady Mountshannon, and half fearful again to offend, they restrained their licentiousness ; yet, the effects of inebriety were still visible in their conversation. Had Matilda's heart been perfectly at ease, their discourse would have disgusted ; but under her present feelings it was almost insupportable. " Ah, madam," whispered she to her mother, " did men but know how much they sunk in the esteem of a virtuous woman by an immodest allusion, how carefully would they guard their lips from every gross expression !"

" Perhaps, my dear girl," returned she, " the fault, in some measure, rests with ourselves ; you are ignorant of the world, and know not that there are women in all ranks of life, who, though they would be shocked by any reflection on their chastity, will yet indulge their debauched imaginations



in loose conversation ; but I, who have once mixed with society, have found true modesty as rare in one sex as the other. Indeed, in my acquaintance with life, I met with so few who could really be called delicate, that I am inclined to think it a very rare virtue."

Mandeville, who had long observed them discoursing, now reeled towards them, and begged to be acquainted with the subject of their conversation.

"It is modesty," replied Matilda, emphatically, "we would have it inrolled among the cardinal virtues ; do you not think it would be as valuable as any of the others ? and, perhaps, too, it would be as difficult to find."

"I cannot differ from such an excellent judge of those things," returned he, sarcastically, though somewhat disconcerted, "but you would not surely be so cruel as to banish from conversation every innocent jest and enlivening rally?"

"I know not to what extent your words may imply. I love wit and well-timed rail-  
lery,"

lery," cried her Ladyship, willing to save Matilda from further converse with him, "but you, Viscount, will perhaps favour us with a definition of true delicacy, contrasting it with awkward bashfulness."

"You have set me a hard task," he replied, "I will take time to consider of it;" then taking Matilda's hand, he attempted to draw her to the further end of the room: finding himself, however, unable to accomplish his purpose, he turned from her, and advancing to her father, said "Damn it, my Lord, cannot you find one any amusement here—it will be curst awkward to spend one's time in this dull place, unless you can invent some variety."

"Be not uneasy, Viscount," he replied, "for to-night we may have recourse to billiards, dice, or any thing that offers; to-morrow I expect some comedians, and have already planned a theatre; besides, I intend soon to give a masquerade, and depend on me I will not stupify you."

The

The comedians not arriving for some days, the party were content to spend the fine mornings either in hunting or riding over the romantic country, and the wet ones, in anxiously preying on each other's fortune; the evenings, though devoted to the ladies, were generally passed in contriving some new entertainment for the morrow, each dissatisfied and tired with the present amusement.

The news of his lordship's arrival soon spreading through the neighbouring towns, the castle was daily crowded with visitors—some induced by curiosity—others by a wish to shew their friendship, and be early in their congratulations; while pleased with the variety of objects which now offered to gratify their avarice, and indulge their talents for ridicule, its inmates became more satisfied with their abode.

Lady Mountshannon observed with pain, both Sir Charles and the Viscount paying a  
lover-

lover-like attention to Matilda, with that easy familiarity of assured success, which all her coldness could not repress; while painfully oppressed by those scenes, she regretted her happy solitude, and felt how wearisome it was to live in a crowd—to smile at folly—or wear a serene countenance, with a heart corroded by grief and harried by suspense! her vivacity wholly forsook her—she sat a silent spectator of all around—her face lost its enlivening smile—and the female visitors would have wondered she could interest the elegant viscount or the more desirable baronet, had they not recollected her large fortune.

In the retirement of her own chamber alone, Matilda could now find relief by giving vent to her sorrows. The monument, her sacred recess for woe, had been for some days deserted. Sir Charles, who made frequent rambles to the village, had there heard of the guardian spirit of the rock, and visiting the little spot to admire the taste that

formed



formed it, had more than once surprised her there; this intrusion on her privacy she could not endure—De Valcourt's image was too closely connected with that place, and she chose rather to forego her visits, than listen to the addresses of another there.

The comedians at last arrived, and the following day was fixed on for the first exhibition; it was to commence early in the afternoon, with feats of activity, which were to be succeeded by a musical romance told in dumb show, taken from an old Scottish ballad; and a masked ball, which Mandeville, who had resided at Venice during the carnival, undertook to manage, was to conclude the evening.

Matilda, who, had she been secure of De Valcourt's love—had her heart been at ease, would have enjoyed the purposed amusement, under her present anxiety, dreaded this scene of gaiety, and wished to be excused appearing; but her father would not  
listen

listen to such a request, and she determined to oblige him, even at the expense of her own feelings, for his kind attentions, both to herself and mother, had already interested her affections. To support a character, and assume cheerfulness, so discordant to her heart, she found impossible, and resolved, therefore, to wear only a simple white robe, shading her face with a deep veil, hoping, in this dress, to pass through the apartments unobserved.

Elevated with expectation of the morrow, the company separated and retired to their chambers, to admire afresh their dress—to compliment themselves on the witty things they should say—the admiration they should excite, and please their fond imaginations with the approaching joy.

Matilda alone of all the group, sat pensive and melancholy. The Viscount and Sir Charles were continually teizing her with declarations of their passion; nor could the  
most

most solemn assurances of her incapability to return their affection, or the care with which she avoided all conversation with them, repress their suit; she could not but contrast the obtrusive, unfeeling gallantry of her present admirers, with the tender, delicate assiduities of De Valcourt, anxious to oblige, yet fearful to offend; and his image was impressed with redoubled force on her mind. The night was cold, but absorbed in painful reflections, she sat late, regardless of its chilling influence, vainly endeavouring to calm the fervent anguish of her heart. The castle clock struck two, and as its sounds vibrated on the stillness of night; Matilda thought of the many anxious hours she had passed in the absence of De Valcourt, till oppressed by the agonizing idea, her faculties became confused; sensations of sorrow almost stopped her breath; she opened her casement for air. The moon shone bright on the desolated walk, where they had so often watched the last faint glimmerings of evening, listening to the ardent feelings which burst from each other's

other's heart. Ah! De Valcourt, though she, as she gazed attentively on the well-known spot, shall we never, never meet again—are the fleeting moments of bliss gone for ever—are souls so firmly united to meet no more—and am I doomed to wear out the remnant of my days in wretchedness? A deep sigh now calmed for a moment her throbbing bosom, which seemed to be echoed from the walk beneath; surprised at the sound, she looked attentively, when a man darting across the path, receded from her view, and was out of sight in a moment. It was the figure, the form of De Valcourt; and she stood fondly expecting his return, till recollecting the improbability of his being there, fearing it the delusion of her disordered fancy, and trembling for her reason, she turned hastily from the window, to recover the powers of reflection, and banish the vision from her mind; but in vain, she could neither recover her spirits—doubt the reality of what she had seen—or drive from her memory the thoughts that oppressed her. Not wholly



wholly free from terror, she sat ruminating on the scene, when she heard footsteps slowly advancing along the gallery towards her chamber; while on the branches of the trees which overhung the windows, she beheld the shadow of a moving light.

Roused by these appearances, and determined no longer to endure this painful suspense, she opened her door; but all was now silent and dark; the lamp which hung suspended over the great staircase, shed but a faint light on this distant part, and the moon-beams, admitted only through the high casements, were too weak to discover objects. She returned for her candle, and again the sound of footsteps seemed approaching nearer; when once more advancing to the door, the well-known voice of Mountford cried, "Hush! Matilda, I am come to bring you welcome intelligence—De Valcourt is at the village; he arrived there this morning."

Unable to recover the surprise this news occasioned, or suppress the emotions that at once assailed her, Mountford remained some time in her apartment before she could enquire the cause of his visit at that late hour, or he relate it, alarmed as he was, by the pale agitated figure of his sister.

At length, recovering a little composure, he said, "As I returned from riding this afternoon, Duncan met me in the court and with a face of joy, informed me, his master was arrived; bidding me wait in my chamber, when the family were retired, and he would give me further particulars. This I did, but scarce had the old man entered my room, when we were interrupted by Sir Charles, who came to shew me his masquerade dress, and enquire what habit you intended to wear; of this I could not inform him, though I believe he doubted my assertions, when I assured him of my ignorance. Yet so full was the baronet of this expected pleasure, that though I complained of fatigue, and  
made

made many efforts to disengage myself from him, he did not quit me for a considerable time. Eager for intelligence, I then flew to Duncan, who, wearied with expectation, had nearly fallen asleep. He, however, soon roused, and then, with a countenance in which joy and sorrow were blended, he cried, "Ah! my poor master is strangely altered since he left the castle; he is so pale, so sorrowful, you would scarce know him; and well he may be, for he has written constantly to Lady Matilda, though we have never heard of him; and has felt as much distress for us, as your kind-hearted sister, and all of us have for him. When I told him," continued he, "that no such letters had arrived, and that Lady Matilda had fretted herself sick with grief, he started and cried, "then my lord has discovered our affection, and he has intercepted my letters. Yet, no that cannot be; there is, however, some mystery which time will reveal. I must see Matilda and her excellent mother; return in the evening, I will then write and prepare them

them for my coming." And where are those letters? cried I, impatiently." "You shall have them directly," returned he, "but I must first inform you, that when I went again, he looked much better, and told me, that the assurances I had given him of his being still dear to the idol of his heart, (that was his word) had already cured him of all his sorrows;" then, presenting me with letters, I retired: there was one for my mother, one for yourself, and one addressed to me, which I have opened; but the contents, alas! has somewhat abated the joy I feel at the arrival of De Valcourt: He expresses his doubts of our father's honour—has received certain intelligence that he had some time back lost large sums to the Viscount Mandeville, which, being unable to pay, the Viscount had spoken of him in the most opprobrious terms so publicly that a duel had ensued, and since that time they had been sworn friends."

Matilda



Matilda trembled while he spoke ; her heart sickened to forego the pleasing hope of her father's return to virtue ; it was painful to her to cherish the doubts this letter created in her mind ; she longed, too, to open her own, but could not endure that even Mountford should witness the delight with which she should gaze on its contents : While unconscious of her impatience, he continued to talk of De Valcourt ; told her he intended to be at their masked ball ; spoke of the pleasure his company, and her own renewed spirits, would add to the evening's entertainment, till, recollecting the lateness of the hour, after lighting his candle, which, in his fear of discovery, he had extinguished on Matilda's first opening her door, he retired.

Convinced now that it must have been De Valcourt she had before seen, she again opened the casement, with the pleasing hope he might still linger there, and singing a favourite sonnet, looked wistfully round ;

but no voice answered to the sound—all was silent and deserted, when, closing the window with a sigh, and breaking the seal of her letter, she read, with mixed emotions of pain and pleasure, its contents :

“ Ah ! Matilda, what agony have I endured since last we parted !—the tortures of the past month have been almost insupportable, though my whole life, which has been but a scene of varied misery, had, I thought, armed my mind for every evil ; yet I have sunk under this exquisite torment, and yielding to the impetuosity of my temper, have cursed the hour of my existence, the wickedness of mankind, and my own folly to credit a woman’s professions. Pardon me, that I could think so meanly of you, as to suppose you would discard me from your love, deprive me of your friendship, and leave me in despair ; and that, too, without acquainting me with the cause, without hearing the criminal you condemn, plead in his defence ; Yet, what could I think ? I  
addressed

addressed you regularly every post, and waited hours, days, and weeks, arduously expecting your reply, and waited, alas ! but to be disappointed ! One moment I trembled for your health—the next, condemned your cruel caprice. I had no suspicion my letters could be intercepted, nor can I now form any idea how your father (for to him I must impute my disappointment) could possess himself of those I wrote previous to his arrival here, or how he obtained a knowledge of our correspondence ; Sir Charles alone was acquainted with the whole of my conduct, and he is too generous, too honest to betray me. I have been introduced to the King—have presented my petition, and endured the mortifying, the insulting treatment of an impostor.

“ Leinster, the only witness of my preservation and escape, is dead ; I have no proof of the validity of my claims, and must submit to the reproach. Ah ! why was I tempted to enter again the paths of greatness !

ness, to satisfy the prejudice of a misjudging world!—no, it was the hope of shielding my Matilda from its censure. Proud and selfish as I am, that dare yet to call thee mine, though in possessing thee, I must expose thee to the bitterest taunts of malice—link thy name with mine, marked as it is with infamy—as the usurper of false titles—the wretch who would impose on the credulity of mankind; but I will not long endure this treatment; my pride—my honour is concerned now to vindicate my right, and I will raise heaven and earth to procure justice.

“ I have seen your father, who knew mine, and once saw me when a child; but he cannot, or will not, remember any traces of my countenance; have pointed out to him scenes he must recollect, yet he meanly denies any knowledge of me; the motive, however, is now clear, since he has discovered our love. I cannot, in my real character, enter the castle while he remains there;



there; I will not meet his contempt—I know not how far I could command my temper, and will not hazard so much; yet, screened by the general disguise to-morrow's entertainment allows, I will venture to see you, unless forbid by your mother, to whom I would submit my conduct.

“Sir Charles is in possession of my estate, which he has generously offered to resign; but I will not condescend to accept, as a gift, from any man, what I must consider as my right.

“Matilda, how I long to be soothed once more by an assurance from thine own lips that thou still lovest! Sir Charles has free access to thee; I know his admiration of thee is strong, and should he, in violation of his promise, dare to love thee—to plead his passion; should a father urge thee to accept his hand, and a mother, yielding to his wishes, join her more powerful persuasions, couldst thou resist their united efforts

in favour of an outcast like myself? I know he has virtues; fortune and fame, too, are his; and that thought sometimes drives me to despair. Yet he cannot love like me; his heart is not so nearly allied to thee as mine; he cannot so fully appreciate thy worth. Farewell!—Remember the affection, the agitation, and soothe the fears of thy

DE VALCOURT."

Matilda, in whose mind this letter had raised strong suspicions of Sir Charles, impatiently longed for the approaching evening, that she might satisfy her doubts. She rose next morning with a light heart; to know that her De Valcourt was safe—that in a few hours she should see and converse with him, was to her the height of happiness. She could not look forward to any future evil; pleasure again sparkled in her eye, and re-animated her countenance. The day was a busy one; she had only time to acquaint Lady Mountshannon with De Valcourt's

court's intention, and solicit her approbation, which she reluctantly gave, yielding rather to the desires of Matilda, and the peculiarity of the circumstance, than to her conviction of its propriety or safety. Satisfied with her consent, Matilda dispatched the delighted Duncan with an affectionate note to his now happy master, before she began to prepare for the evening.

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only one she had only time to  
say, that Lady Moun-  
L 6 CHAP.

## CHAP. VII.

He came the bard, a little druid wight,  
 Of wither'd aspect ; but his eye was keen,  
 With sweetness mix'd.—In russet brown bedight  
 As is his sister of the copses green.  
 He crept along, unpromising of mien ;  
 Gross he who judges so ; his soul was fair,  
 Bright as the children of yon azure sheen,  
 True comeliness, which nothing can impair,  
 Dwells in the mind—all else is vanity and glare.

THOMSON.

**W**ITHOUT a wish in her personal appearance beyond what decency required, the task of dress was with Matilda soon performed, and she sat contemplating the figure of De Valcourt in her little drawing, which was now finished, and become the favourite ornament of her apartment, till Lady Mountshannon came to attend her to the company.

With



With renovated spirits she descended to the parlour, the glow of expectation dancing in her eye; and Sir Charles, as he led her to her seat in the theatre, could not refrain from whispering his admiration; while the viscount, disappointed by the forward baronet, could only follow in her train, and gaze, with delight, on the object he hoped soon to possess, and who had never, till that moment, appeared half so lovely in his eyes. Her father had promised him her hand, and he felt secure; nor had he the most distant idea of winning her affections by assiduous tenderness. A man of his consequence, and personal attractions, aided by parental influence, had no reason, he thought, to dread a refusal; and he had beheld, till now, the attentions of his rival with the most perfect indifference.

The entertainment commenced, which, at first, afforded little amusement to Matilda. The feats of activity, though they excited her admiration and created surprise, could

raise no interest in her bosom—could awaken no sympathy in her heart, and she had full leisure to observe the conduct of Sir Charles—to listen to his insinuating addresses—to mention again his friend, and again hear him dexterously shift the subject, till she felt convinced, that De Valcourt had, in him, cherished the false friend that betrayed him. Yet, when she gazed on his countenance, which benevolence illumined—where openness and candour beamed, she could hardly credit the circumstances which so strongly impressed her with belief. She feared to acquaint De Valcourt with her suspicions, though she dreaded concealment still more; whatever had the appearance of mystery, seemed to her fraught with mischief, and betrayed a consciousness of error.

The dramatic romance at length began, when, feeling the full effect of acting, and alive only to the scene before her, she forgot Sir Charles, and remembered only the pleasure De Valcourt would enjoy, could he partake

partake of the amusement which now fascinated all her powers. Two warriors—the heads of ancient clans, long at enmity with each other, uniting for their common safety, had driven the enemy from their coasts, and were returning victorious from the field, preceded by the bards of their respective houses, recounting the valorous deeds of each, when, by some ill-timed flattery of their followers, the rancorous hatred so long cherished in their hearts, again broke out: The quarrel, fomented by their friends, soon became desperate; they fought, and the battle, maintained by obstinate valour, continued, till the death of one chief put an end to the combat. The victor then crowned with the spoils of the vanquished, approaches his home, when, presenting his sister, the first person he meets at the gate with the armour of his antagonist, yet reeking with blood, to decorate the hall of his father, he prepares to enter to the banquet, amidst the acclamations of his countrymen, and the martial sounds of drum and trumpet.

But

But his attention is arrested by the reproaches of the lady, who, while she gazes on the spoils, recognizes the well-known armour of her lover; the youth who had long been in possession of her secret affection; to whom she had been led to hope, since the union of their families, she should be united to for ever, and whose return she had expected with impatience. The mute anguish of the lady, as she pressed the broken armour to her heart—the reproachful looks she cast at her brother—the despair which seemed to chill every faculty of her soul as she sunk on the ground, refusing all consolation, contrasted with the joy of the warriors, and the proud exulting looks of the victor, displayed such powers of acting, as passed Matilda's conception.

When the performance was finished, the range of apartments brilliantly illuminated, were opened for the masks; in the grand saloon, the band was placed for dancers; while the rooms to the right and left were covered



covered with all kinds of refreshments; through these were other apartments with lights arranged in fanciful devices, which receiving from the great hall a refreshing coolness, would form an agreeable retreat to the company, when heated by the crowd, or the exercise of dancing.

The party all retiring to put on their fanciful habits, Matilda, who had no other change to make than her veil, seated herself in the saloon, which was already beginning to fill, anxiously expecting the arrival of De Valcourt.

Lord Mountshannon, acting as master of the feast, wore a Highland dress; while his lady, and the attending servants, appearing in the same, gave a pleasing effect to the scene. Mountford, who played the bagpipe with exquisite taste, appeared as ancient piper to the castle, singing plaintive ditties or heroic ballads, adapted to the simple harmony of the country. Sir Charles, fond of ac-

tion,

tion, assumed the habit of a sailor, entertaining the groups he could engage with histories of unknown worlds where he had sailed, and perilous adventures he had been in, interrupting his narration, to express his admiration of the scene before him in rude technical terms, which excited continual laughter. The viscount wore a Venetian dress, and with his guitar, suspended by a crimson cord round his neck, paraded the rooms, at times touching the instrument to soft Italian airs, or joining the dancers, as inclination prompted.

Matilda continued for some time to watch the entrance of every guest unnoticed. The company expecting to see some fanciful display of taste in her appearance, had no idea that she was the pensive figure in the veil; while Sir Charles, deceived by the same expectation, vainly sought her in every mask that bore the least resemblance to her in form or figure. At length, moving her seat to have a more perfect view of the grand entrance,

entrance, he recognized her, and resolving she should no longer remain a silent spectator, or continue in the apartments without sustaining a character, he advanced with much solemnity, and falling on one knee, addressed her as the guardian spirit of the rocks of Britain, imploring her protection, when he should again sail on the ocean, declaring himself one of the humblest of her votaries. Disconcerted at being thus discovered, and fearing she should not soon disengage herself from the officious baronet, Matilda was at first unwilling to reply, but finding he was not to be diverted from his purpose, she answered in the same tone of gravity, "As a spirit my office is very peculiar—my powers limited—I am only allowed to be the guardian of truth and justice, and cannot exert my influence for any one who has ever violated those sacred principles—who has ever encroached, in thought, word, or deed on his neighbour's right—betrayed the confidence reposed in him—or practised deceit ;

you

you will, therefore, acknowldge I have no power to serve you."

Sir Charles bowed assent, and then with much gravity, began in a loud voice to proclaim her office and character, inviting all who had claims to prefer them now—offering large rewards to those who could stand the scrutiny and be returned as fit objects of her care, after looking in the magic mirror of her eye. The light form and simple drefs of Matilda according with every idea of a supernatural being, she was presently furrounded by the crowd; while the name and office of the genius of truth and justice was echoed through the apartments. Two men clad in rusty armour, now advanced to claim her protection, boasting their deeds of valour—telling of the many damsels they had rescued from tyrannic fathers—the helpless innocents they had sheltered from oppression.

"And how far, do you suppose," said she, "the simple love of justice influenced your actions?"



actions?"—They were silent, and she proceeded—"Did no wish for fame—no love of popularity—no selfish feeling, prompt your hearts—was it a pure disinterested effort of benevolence—have you analysed your feelings?"

They now assured her they had, and found themselves fully entitled to her protection; but before she could reply, a contest arose between them for the pre-eminence in her favour, which they agreed to decide by the sword; and a circle being soon formed, a mock combat commenced, which dividing the attention, drew from her some of the crowd, with which she had been surrounded, when the viscount approached, and kneeling at her feet, sang an Italian song on the powers of love; while Sir Charles, determined not to be driven from his place, railed at his foreign jargon, in language suited to his character.

The

The combat beginning to flag, Matilda and her party were again the objects of entertainment ; when oppressed by the increasing crowd, she was entreating her father, who, gratified by the admiration she excited, had joined the party, to lead her from the place, when the attention of the company was attracted by the entrance of a new character—an old man, apparently bending under the pressure of age, slowly advanced through the throng ; his venerable grey hairs shaded his forehead, and a beard of the same colour hung below his breast—a loose robe covered his body—in his hand he carried a magic wand—while from his neck, a harp was suspended, which he struck to exquisite harmony, as he sung some stanzas of an old ballad. The novelty of the figure, and the powers of music, charmed for some moments, this tumultuous assembly to silence. Matilda was deserted, who, unable to suppress the rising emotions that throbbed at her heart, stood gazing in speechless delight

on

on the altered form, while she recognized the well-known voice of De Valcourt.

When the music ceased, the venerable sage, professing the double sight so often boasted by his countrymen, began in enigmatical language, to describe the characters, and foretell the future events in life of every person that accosted him. As De Valcourt had seen much of the world, and possessed in an eminent degree the powers of oratory, joined to a fascinating sweetness of voice, they were at first greatly pleased with his eccentricities.

Lord Mountshannon, who had listened for some time to the strange figure, at length stepped forward, and demanded to know if his future schemes would prove successful, and the remainder of his life be happy.—The sage gazed with scrutinizing earnestness on the only part of his face visible through his mask, and shaking his head, would have passed on, but his lordship, whose intellects had never gained sufficient strength to shake  
off

off the superstitious prejudices in which he had been educated, was rendered more anxious by this seeming reluctance, and continued strongly to urge his suit, till De Valcourt, hoping to impress his mind with some serious reflection, uttered in a solemn tone, the following words :

“ Let the tyrant tremble on his seat, the days of his power will have an end—he is spreading his snare—he exults in his machinations, but they shall overwhelm him with confusion ; the virtuous shall triumph, while the selfish and unfeeling shall be his own tormentor ; thou hast cast away happiness from thee, O man !—return to the paths of rectitude and be blessed !”

Astonished at sentences so applicable to himself, Lord Mountshonnon trembled ; that daring man, who could set the laws of society at defiance—whose morals were ever subservient to his interest or pleasures, was disconcerted. In vain did he attempt to laugh

at



at the solemn fool; as he retired from the crowd a hoarse discordant sound betrayed him to the discerning observer, and shewed his irritated feelings under the thin veil of affected mirth.

The company, who began now to grow tired of this dull farce, and who after hearing the reproof which so much affected his lordship, dreaded among so many general remarks on vice and folly, some that might strike home to their own bosoms, turned from him to find more animated objects of amusement.

De Valcourt, who had but just discovered Matilda, now sprang forward, hoping to escape with her from this scene of confusion to some spot where they might more freely converse; but Mandeville, whose passion (if inclination like his might be called passion) was raised to a higher pitch than usual, had again thrown himself at her feet, and encouraged by the wine he had drank, and the

familiarity the entertainment allowed, was pleading his love with all the eloquence he was master of, repeating, when his own rhetoric failed, scraps of French and Italian sonnets; whilst Sir Charles, who, from his observations on the viscount's conduct, began to think he was encouraged in his addresses to Matilda by her father, resolving to watch, that he might detect his lordship's duplicity, placed himself close by her side, completely guarding her from the near approach of any other

Again disappointed, De Valcourt waited some more favourable opportunity, and was compelled to listen to the viscount's conversation, while it agonized his heart, till he was more than once on the point of throwing off his disguise and chastising the insolent pleader; but the distress of Matilda, who seemed to implore his patience—the asperity with which she repelled the viscount's addresses—the inconveniences a premature discovery must

must have exposed her to, restrained the impetuosity of his temper.

Sir Charles continued to interrupt the viscount's pleadings by sarcastic observations, in which so much anger was mingled, that Matilda began to be alarmed, when De Valcourt, emboldened by the painful situation to which she was now reduced, taking advantage of the momentary absence of the angry baronet, pressed forward, seizing her arm with one hand, and waving with the other his wand over the company that surrounded her, "It is mine, spirit of virtue," said he, as he drew her hastily along, "to guard thee from the obtrusive gaze of erring mortals, I will lead thee where maternal virtue shall be thy shield," darting with swiftness through the crowd, who surprised and awed by his impressive manners, attempted not to stop them; they were out of the apartment in a moment; but Sir Charles, who suspected an intrigue, and who thought he remembered the voice of De Valcourt, determined to fol-

low them as soon as he could steal away unobserved.

Arriving almost breathless in the hall, De Valcourt entreated Matilda to go with him to the library, where they might be free from interruption; half fearing to comply, yet strongly inclined to go, she hesitated, when urging more warmly his request, assuring her it was the only moment he should have before his departure, to listen to the voice of love, or give her a faint picture of his own feelings, as his honour was concerned, to vindicate his claim to the family title, and clear his character from the odium of an impostor, she suffered him to lead her along, till recollecting with how much greater satisfaction she should enjoy this conversation, if Lady Mountshannon, who would be pained if she missed her from the apartments, was acquainted with it, she entreated him to return, and see her mother before they proceeded to the library.



De Valcourt, who stung with jealousy, and agitated by fears, interpreted every part of Matilda's conduct to a change of affection, and the impressions his rivals had made on her heart, could not endure this seeming reluctance, but yielding to the violence of passion, he threw himself on the floor, upbraiding her with inconstancy—refusing to rise or listen to the voice of reason. Nor was it till after she had soothed him with the most endearing expressions of affection—the most fervent assurances of unalterable love, she could calm the agony of his mind. At length the energy that beamed on her face—the tears that trickled down her cheeks, struck conviction to his heart; he felt the injustice of his suspicions, and became in turn, the anxious pleader for pardon of his impetuous fury; and Matilda loved too well to withhold her forgiveness, so necessary at the present moment to his happiness; though she resolved at some future period to correct that violence of temper, and erase from his

mind that aptitude to suspicion his commerce with evil had created.

He was now equally ardent in thanks for her goodness; acknowledged the propriety of her wish, and was preparing to lead her back in search of Lady Mountshannon, when a figure gliding along the dark end of the hall, towards that part of the castle which still remained uninhabited, alarmed Matilda; the mask, which in his agitation, had fallen from De Valcourt's face, was not yet replaced, and she feared they were watched; but he endeavoured to dissipate her fears, and her mind being occupied with more tender sollicitude, she passed on, and soon forgot the circumstance.

They walked unmolested through the apartments, anxiously seeking Lady Mountshannon; the company were divided into various groups, some were dancing, others idly strolling from mask to mask, some assembled round the supper-tables, were drink-

drinking lewd toasts, and amusing their debauched imaginations with all the varied turns wit could give to indecency; and others, already intoxicated, were reeling along in stupid imbecility, or rioting with noisy vociferation, as their temper or general habits inclined them.

In one corner of a room that was almost deserted, they beheld the Viscount Mandeville and Lord Mountshannon in earnest conversation, heated both by wine and anger, and apparently thrown off their guard, forgetful of the place they were in and the numbers that surrounded them. Matilda as soon as she saw her father, was about to retire, but De Valcourt darting his eyes round and seeing Lady Mountshannon, seated on a sofa in great agitation, arrested her steps. They soon approached her, when at their earnest desire, she retired with them a little farther from the place where his lordship was sitting, that she might attend to their discourse, though too much interested in the

conversation she had accidentally heard, to quit the apartment.

De Valcourt then gave a brief history of his conduct during his month of absence, and related the observations he had been able to make on his lordship, which seemed to add greatly to the agitation of Lady Mountshannon. He then entreated her to allow him a few minutes private conversation with Matilda in the library, to which she readily consented; indeed, so firmly was she at that moment persuaded of De Valcourt's honour, and so much were her fears excited by what had fallen from her husband and the Viscount, that she would gladly have united them for ever, had the means been at hand.

But scarce had they quitted the spot, when Matilda caught the eye of her father, who suddenly starting from his seat, immediately joined them, and attempted to be gay; the effort, however, was vain, and the whole



whole party disconcerted by this rencontre, walked silently on, till again mingling with the crowd which filled the other rooms, they lost somewhat of their present embarrassment in the sallies of the maskers who addressed them ; but De Valcourt was obliged to restrain his impatience till Matilda could retire unnoticed, which did not happen till the evening was far advanced, when fearful of observation, she went alone to wait his arrival in the library.

Thinking himself now secure, he was preparing to follow, and had actually reached the last room through which he was to pass, when he was arrested by an old woman, who striking him lightly over the shoulder with her crutch, cried “ Stop, thou hypocrite ; does it belong to the hoary head to follow beauty to its secret chambers—was it for this you wore the habit of sanctity—for this you read grave lectures on morality, and condemned our festive gaiety ? But I will prevent you—age, wrinkles, and deformity shall

be your companion for this night ;” so saying, she put her arm within his, and grasped it with a vehemence, wholly incompatible with her decrepid appearance. In vain did he endeavour to disengage his arm ; in vain in his rage did he curse the beldam, who thus detained him from his Matilda ; in vain he entreated her to release him ; she laughed at his prayers and his rage, till fearing from his violent efforts, he should disengage himself from her grasp, she uttered a loud scream, which drew round them a number of spectators, who, diverted with the distress of the sage, and the obstinate perseverance of his persecutor, had no inclination to quit the scene. Convinced he could not now escape, she loosed her hold, and De Valcourt endeavoured to evade her pursuit, but she crossed him at every step, till the company began to separate. The rooms were nearly emptied, the candles burnt dim, and the spirits of the guests seemed exhausted, all but his tormenter’s, who appeared determined not to lose sight of him while he remained in any of the apartments.

Lord

Lord Mountshannon too, eyed him with scrutinizing attention, as he bade farewell to his company, till he thought it would be best to pass the gate, and lingering about the castle, find some means to see Matilda from her window, and tell her his situation. The old woman followed him through the court, and then satisfied with having disappointed him for that night returned saying, "De Valcourt, you are known; farewell, Marquis, and remember next time you masquerade it, to find some more effectual disguise."

Matilda, who would, in her present situation, have thought even a minute tedious, waited hour after hour, anxiously listening to every breeze that conveyed to her ears the mingled sounds from the distant apartments, fondly fancying De Valcourt's footsteps in every rustling noise, till she heard the great clock strike two, three, and four with fretful impatience. Her pride now took the alarm; De Valcourt, she thought had found some at-

tractive female, and regardless of her impatience—of the solicitude she felt, was trifling away those precious hours, which would, perhaps, never return, in the mere effusions of thoughtless gallantry; for to what else could she impute his long delay? Resolving to wait no longer his leisure, she walked pensively through the long passage, reflecting as she went, on the pangs of ill-requited love, and determining, if possible, to subdue her ill-placed affection. As she passed along the hall, the rattling of the carriage wheels through the court as the guests were departing, broke her reverie, and she felt half inclined to enter the rooms, to convince herself if her suspicions of De Valcourt were true; but her spirits were unequal to the task, and she slowly ascended the stairs to her mother's chamber.

Lady Mountshannon was yielding to depression of spirits when Matilda entered; the events of the day had created a kind of gloomy superstition in her mind—an anxious fore-



foreboding of future evil, which all her reasoning powers were not able wholly to controul; but repressing these painful sensations in the presence of her daughter, whose mind she was unwilling to pain by a recital of those circumstances which had wounded her own, she pressed her to her maternal bosom, while she related the cause which detained De Valcourt from her. Matilda's anger being quickly changed into regret, she retired to weep her disappointment, and pity the man she had just before condemned.

No sooner did she reach her apartment, then it occurred to her, that De Valcourt, who had been accustomed to enter the library through a covered walk of the garden, might have recourse to that expedient now, as she could not believe he would quit the castle without making some effort to see her, and remembering the outer door was fastened, she once more went back to place the key on the outside; but as some of the company still lingered in the avenues, fearing to remain

remain there, she hastily returned to wait till all was silent and at rest.

The varied emotions of hope, fear, expectation, and disappointment, which had agitated her through the night, now subsided into settled sorrow. She could think of nothing but the approaching separation from De Valcourt—the uncertainty of their meeting again; till dwelling on those fears which crowded her mind, she began to think of the expected interview as the moment when she must bid him an eternal adieu, and her heart sickened at the thought. United to him, she fancied her mind sufficiently strong to bear every other evil; but to be severed for ever, was an idea too painful to be endured.

In the midst of these corroding reflections, Matilda fancied she heard the music of De Valcourt's harp; she listened with profound attention, and for some moments all was silent, when a few chords were again struck; she then hastily opened the window; it was dark

dark and cloudy—no star illumined the sky, only a few distant streaks of light proclaimed approaching day. She looked earnestly round, but could discern no object—still she stood contemplating, in her mind's eye, the well-known prospect, till the starting tear relieved the throbbings of her bosom, when a man walking pensively beneath her window, seemed to fix his eyes attentively on her; this, she thought must be De Valcourt—and the thought was confirmed, when calling on his name he approached, and pointing his hand, as if to some object within hearing, remained silent. She paused a moment, then writing on a slip of paper “The key is on the outside of the library door; I will steal there if all is quiet.—God bless you.” She threw it from the window, and hastily closing the casement, crept softly along the gallery, listening to every noise which seemed to interrupt the solemn stillness which now prevailed, where riot had so lately revelled.

Not

Not perfectly satisfied with herself, her mind for the first time felt a superstitious dread, she started at the echo of her own footsteps ; while the antique figures of her ancestors shook by the eddies of wind which played through this gothic building, seemed to her disturbed fancy to threaten some impending danger ; there was something in this secret meeting which impressed her with awe. The lamp in the hall was nearly extinguished, and the light she carried assailed by the current of air as she descended the stairs, scarce sufficed to guide her steps ; as she reached the bottom a cat who had been sleeping, disturbed by her approach, sprung across the path, when Matilda sunk down in momentary terror, till venturing to look round she beheld the animal, and laughed at her own fears. Ah ! thought she, what is it that makes such a coward of me ? Am I conscious of pursuing a wrong action ? Surely no—for it would be cruel to let De Valcourt depart without the most solemn assurances of my love : it must be the secre-



cy then with which I am obliged to admit him, that thus unnerves me—yet certainly we have a right when oppressed by power, to procure happiness for ourselves by any means, not injurious to our fellow creatures; why then am I so weak—I will yield no longer to these foolish fears.

Somewhat roused by these reflections, she reached the library, De Valcourt was not yet come, and she sat endeavouring to collect spirits for this wished for, yet dreaded interview; one moment she resolved to brave every danger, and entreat him to allow her to share his fortunes, and by an immediate union prevent the possibility of their being ever sundered—the next, the fears Lady Mountshannon had raised in her mind of his inconstancy, and the idea that he might cease to love her, made her shudder; besides she had little reason to hope De Valcourt would consent to an union, however desirable, while his name was loaded with the obloquy of an impostor.

Thus

Thus lost in a train of painful reflection, the outer door was suddenly opened, and before she had time to observe the object that entered, Matilda was folded in the arms of Sir Charles. Disappointment, indignation, and terror, for sometime held her silent, and suspended every faculty of her soul, till at length resuming her natural courage, she broke from his grasp, and running to the door had nearly escaped, when placing himself so as to guard the passage, and seizing her hand, he again forcibly detained her, but darting on him a look of ineffable disdain, while anger sparkled in her eye, she commanded him to release her hand, declaring she would not remain a moment longer with him. The energy with which she spoke, and the resolution which seemed to animate her whole frame, awed even the libertine, Sir Charles; and he immediately dropped the hand he had before grasped with such fervor, but still keeping his back to the door, he continued to entreat she would hear him.

Ma-

Matilda, though subject to sudden gusts of passion, had taken too much pains to subdue this error of her temper, to remain long under its influence, and the idea of midnight rape and murders not being present to her imagination, she sat down with tolerable composure to listen to the Baronet, while he who had expected and prepared himself to encounter all the difficulties female terror and disappointment could create, was at first rather disconcerted by the calm composure of her manners, but soon recovering himself, he sunk at her feet in an attitude of distress, and began to breath forth the ardor of his passion, to complain of her coldness, and impute to that his present conduct, continuing with great volubility to plead, till she stopped him short by reminding him of the indelicacy of chusing that moment for such a conversation, and coolly observed as she moved towards the door, if he had nothing else to say it was unnecessary to detain her longer ; when stung by her indifference, he cried, had De Val-

court

court been here, madam, you would not have been in such a hurry to depart, it was for him these lines were intended, holding in his hand the paper she had incautiously thrown from the window, it is not to the indelicacy of an assignation that you object, but only to him who has met you.

Matilda, though much agitated, was too well prepared by his preceding conduct, to be thrown off her guard, and fixing her eyes steadfastly on his face, she said, "Ungenerous as your present treatment of me is, mean too as is the advantage you have taken of me, and treacherous as I suspect your conduct to De Valcourt has been, I will yet tell to you the situation of my heart, while I endeavour to explain the motives of my actions, which I hope will induce you to behave with equal sincerity. I will not affect to have misunderstood your attentions—no, I have seen with regret the preference with which you honored me, and even you must do me the justice to acknowledge that I  
have



have uniformly repelled your love ; before I knew you my heart was devoted to De Valcourt—I had rescued him from death—had watched him thro' a lingering illness, and heard a faithful recital of every action of his past life ; had found in him such a perfect congeniality that our hearts had formed an indissoluble union even before we were aware that we loved ; our wishes were in unison, and with us it seemed like one mind animating two bodies—mine is not an affection that can be shaken—time and absence, those foes to love, would I am persuaded, only add strength to mine ;—a heart thus occupied—warmed with such ardent feelings could have no idle vanity to gratify—and your passion, whether real or affected, has ever given me pain.” Sir Charles would have interrupted her here, but waving her hand to demand attention, he was silent. “ I have admired,” continued she, “ the superior powers of your mind, but the licentious indulgence you allowed your own vices, and the sarcastic severity

verity with which you scann'd the faults of others, deterred me from seeking your friendship, forgive this freedom, I am going to give you still greater proofs of my sincerity."

END OF VOL. I.

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